A FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSE IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE:

A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

While community colleges have focused on providing access for students to higher education, too many are leaving before completing a degree or certificate. One solution is for community colleges to create First-Year Experience (FYE) courses to provide the skills and guidance students need to be successful in college. This research provides students' first-hand perceptions of the benefits and detriments of the course.

My research answers the following question: What are the perceptions of first-time-in-college students regarding the impact a first-year experience course at a campus of a large community college system had on their persistence in higher education? Sub-questions were asked about the content of the course, the particularly useful components of the course for their goals, and the impact it had on students' persistence in higher education. Additionally, the role of intrusive advising was analyzed to determine if that component had an impact on students' retention and persistence in higher education.

Using an ethnographic approach, I interviewed ten diverse students who found three consistent benefits to the course: academic support, engaged faculty, and intrusive advising. Academic support included components such as study skills, learning styles, career exploration, goal-setting, and tutoring. Engaging faculty cared about their students and encouraged them to continue toward their educational goals. The intrusive advising mandated in the course helped students know where they needed to go next during their educational journey. Through the multi-layered supports provided throughout the semester, students perceived a primarily positive outcome to this FYE course.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all community college students who take on the challenge of earning a higher education degree while working and managing a family. This is for you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Attending college has become a basic expectation of most parents. Maybe they graduated from college and have reaped the rewards of their earned degree. Others may have toiled hard without a degree and want better for their children. They believe that a college diploma will provide their children that needed job and financial security. Additionally, some individuals may learn from people other than their parents that having a college degree will provide them greater access to job opportunities and a better life. Whatever their reason, 16.8 million students were enrolled in some form of higher education in 2017 (NCES Data, 2020). Unfortunately, these same students do not always have the necessary knowledge and skills to move from their first semester in college to their earned certificate or degree. Many students do not have the cultural knowledge of what is necessary to succeed in college and break through the barriers that many encounter during those years. What role does higher education have in meeting these needs?

Much research exists regarding the persistence of students in their first year of college (Upcraft & Gardner, 1990; Tinto, 1993; Braxton, 2000; Astin, 2005; Seidman, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzine, 2005; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). These studies have focused on the causes of attrition (Tinto, 1993; Braxton, 2000) and some possible solutions (Astin, 2005; Seidman, 2005). One solution recommended by Upcraft and Gardner (1990) and Upcraft, Gardner, and Barefoot (2005) to increase student

persistence is the inclusion of a first-year experience program to assist students with the transition to college. The programs they recommend include "orientation, developmental advising, academic assistance, mentoring, counseling, residence-hall programs, campus activities, and wellness programs" (p. 22). These programs provide multiple experiences for first-time-in-college (FTIC) students to become engaged with their institution and thereby be prepared to overcome many of the difficulties they may encounter their first year. On a smaller scale, Upcraft and Gardner also suggest that a first-year experience (FYE) course is an excellent way to assist students in reaching their goals. These courses are typically offered as a required course for all incoming freshmen and introduce the students to the institution and provide student success strategies. Their argument is that programs like these can encourage students to persist until graduation.

While most of the research on student persistence and first-year experience programs focuses on four-year universities (Schroeder, 2003; Barefoot, Warnock, Dickinson, Richardson, & Roberts, 1998; Boudreau & Kromrey, 1994; Belcheir, 1997; Fernandez, Whitlock, Martin & VanEarden, 1998; Schnell & Doetkott, 2003; Cavote & Kopera-Frye, 2006; Hendel, 2006; Jamelske, 2009), more students are beginning their education in community colleges. In 2019, 12 million students were enrolled in credit and non-credit courses at community colleges, and 29% of those were first-generation college students (AACC Fast Facts, 2020). Forty-one percent of all first-time freshmen students enrolled at public and private institutions of higher education were enrolled in public two-year institutions in 2019 (AACC Fast Facts, 2020). As enrollment continues

to grow in community colleges, the need for research specifically on persistence of community college students grows more urgent.

Since their inception in 1901 at Joliet Junior College, community colleges have focused on providing access to higher education to more students. The institutions were developed to provide low-cost educational opportunities located in large populations with open access to anyone interested in attending. As their enrollment grew, the institutions changed their focus to maintaining high standards and providing the same quality of education as could be found in four-year universities (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). Recently, however, with the financial constraints and public demand to provide evidence that their tax money is translating to increasing the quality of the workforce, community colleges have had to move their focus to the success of their students.

Community colleges have become the starting point for many students into higher education; however, these same students repeatedly encounter difficulties in meeting their educational goals. Frequently, community college students sign up for their first classes without really knowing what they need to do to succeed. They have been encouraged to go to college to earn a degree, but they do not always have the knowledge necessary to learn how to function at college, nor do they have the necessary skills to succeed. Furthermore, these students typically have additional barriers to their success which include financial need, family obligations, lack of an understanding of campus culture, educational deficiencies, among others. Many of these barriers take students away from the time they should spend either in the classroom or studying.

These issues can also take them away from student services and activities that potentially provide them the needed engagement to overcome some of the difficulties that occur throughout a semester (Roueche, Baker, OmahaBoy, & Mullins, 1987; Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013).

To respond to these needs, many community colleges are beginning to incorporate FYE courses to provide necessary skills and introduce students to the resources that can help them reach their goals. An FYE course can provide the essential support for students to get to know their college, learn what they need to do to succeed, and become acquainted with their peers. Additionally, such a course can encourage faculty to become more engaged with students and how they can support their educational success (Upcraft & Gardner, 1990; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). Lone Star College, a large community college north of Houston, Texas, serving almost 90,000 students in Fall 2019, began offering EDUC 1300: Learning Framework: 1st Year Experience in 2007 geared for students who are entering college for the first time. The goal of this course is to orient the students to college life and what is required to reach their goals. The course description states that the course is "a study of the research and theory in the psychology of learning, cognition, and motivation; factors that impact learning, and application of learning strategies" (EDUC 1300 Syllabus, 2020). It includes having students discover their personality traits and the way they learn. They also make goals and determine what is necessary to reach those goals. The most unique component of the course is the integration of mandatory, intrusive advising for all students enrolled. This requirement mandates that students meet with their assigned

advisor at least twice a semester to discuss what the students need to do regarding registration to meet their academic goals.

Statement of the Problem

While community colleges have focused on providing access for more students to higher education, too many of those students are leaving before completing a degree or certificate. With the focus now moving to success instead of simply access, community colleges are struggling to support students through completion. One solution has been for community colleges to create First-Year Experience (FYE) courses to provide the skills and guidance students need to be successful in college. The research, however, is very limited on whether the courses are beneficial to students. This research provides students' first-hand perceptions of the benefits and challenges of the course.

Origin of the Problem

Although research exists regarding FYE courses, especially within four-year institutions, a consensus regarding whether the courses are worth the cost to either the institution for providing the course or the students who are required to take them does not exist. Additionally, there is insufficient research to discuss the benefits of such programs for community college students. Since students who are enrolled in two-year institutions typically do not attend full-time or live on campus, are not traditional age, and do not engage in as many campus activities as four-year university students, they do not match the same demographics as many university students who have shown success in FYE courses (Upcraft & Gardner, 1990; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). Furthermore, community college students do not persist to their sophomore level courses

at the same rate as four-year university students, adding to the need to determine if an FYE course could assist in this retention (Bailey & Morest, 2006).

While looking at the effect an FYE course could have on community college student retention, it is also important to include the students' voices regarding their experience in such courses. While there is much quantifiable data showing completion, success, persistence, and graduation rates for those individuals who enrolled in FYE courses, that data can only provide a portion of the information relating to the classes. Gaining the students' perspective provides much more validity to the statistical data and helps administrators know the strengths and weaknesses of the course, not just the final results. A qualitative case study will provide the additional support to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of an FYE course. The purpose of this study is to identify the role an FYE course has on the persistence of students at a community college.

Significance of the Problem

Community colleges are under external and internal pressures to get more of their students to graduate. Externally, there are many demands on community colleges to increase the graduation rate. Former President Obama committed the United States to become the leader in the proportion of individuals who have acquired a degree by 2020. The colleges themselves responded to this national call for action by declaring that they will increase the number of students who earn degrees or certificates by fifty percent by 2020. This document was signed by all agencies involved with the improvement and oversight of community colleges, including the American Association of Community Colleges, The Association of Community College Trustees, and the League for

Innovation in the Community Colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2010). Current President Trump has not made a similar point of the importance of increasing college attainment, but community colleges are still moving toward reaching their earlier established goals. This study can provide administrators at community colleges information on a potential opportunity to increase student persistence and, thereby, graduation rates. They would gain a better understanding of the role an FYE course can have on student persistence. Gaining a more complete picture of what attributes of a course were found beneficial to students can assist administrators, faculty, and advisors in determining what components of the course should be maintained and expanded and what components need changing or removing.

Researcher's Relationship to the Problem

As the Vice President of Instruction at Lone Star College-University Park, I am the supervisor of our FYE course, and in my former role as Dean of Education, English, Humanities, and Mathematics at Lone Star College-Tomball, I was the direct supervisor of the course. I also previously served as the curriculum team facilitator for EDUC 1300 system-wide. I first became involved with the EDUC 1300 course in July 2009, when I became dean over the division. At the same time, I became the campus representative on the Achieving the Dream Steering Committee. The system began offering EDUC 1300 as a response to the weakness we found in our data when we joined Achieving the Dream in 2005. These four roles: vice president, dean, curriculum team facilitator, and Achieving the Dream steering committee member, have put me in an active leadership role over the development and implementation of our FYE course.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used in this study:

Attrition can be defined in numerous ways, and the distinctions are frequently made due to the institution type. For this study in a community college, attrition is defined as "any student who enrolls at an institution one semester but does not enroll the next semester and has not completed his or her formally declared program of study" (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 489).

The community college is "*any institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree*" (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013, p. 5). Its primary mission is to provide academic and workforce certificates and associate degrees, provide the core curriculum for transfer students, and provide community education.

First-Year Experience (FYE) is the response colleges and universities have made to attempt to increase student persistence from their freshman to their sophomore year. These include "programs and practices to facilitate students' adjustment to college; personal and academic success; and, ultimately, persistence to the second year and beyond" (Keup & Petschauer, 2011, p. 1).

A first-year experience course is a course required of first-time-in-college (FTIC) students that "provides students with opportunities to develop the personal competencies necessary for success in college and in life . . . [and] places a great deal of emphasis on developing effective study skills, increasing self-awareness, and establishing appropriate

links between individual needs and the resources available within the college community" (Siegel, 1990, p. 253).

Intrusive advising occurs when advisors "initiate early contact; help the student to identify strengths and weaknesses; and develop plans for academic, social, and organization improvement" (Smith, 2007, p. 814).

Persistence at the community college is the "maintenance of continued enrollment for two or more semesters, specifically from Fall term to Spring term and/or completion of a degree/certificate or transfer to a four-year college" (Crawford, 1999, p. 13).

Student Success is the percentage of students who were enrolled in a course on the official day of record and earned a grade of A, B, or C at the end of that semester.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last century, community colleges have moved from being an afterthought of higher education to enrolling almost half of all freshmen in college. During that time, the organization, structure, and funding of community colleges has changed dramatically, and the colleges have added additional goals and objectives. The basic mission, though, has remained the same since spelled out by the Truman Commission on Higher Education. Community colleges provide "proper education for all the people of the community without regard to race, sex, religion, color, geographical location, or financial status" (Rouche, Baker, OmahaBoy, & Mullins, 1987, p. 4). This mission has given the community college such nicknames as "'democracy's college,' 'opportunity college,' and the people's college'" (p. 4). The open-door policy of community colleges has provided access for all while also creating barriers to those who do not have the necessary skills to reach their goals.

The Community College

A Brief Historical Review

The public community college was developed in 1901 as an extension of the high school at Joliet High School. This new institution was requested by William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago, as a way to provide high school graduates social and academic preparation for the last two years of college or, as Harper defined, "senior college" (Roueche & Roueche, 1993, p. 2). The original goals were not

necessarily to expand the opportunity of higher education to more students but to reroute students from the premier universities, especially those students who were mechanically or domestically inclined (Zwerling, 1973).

Private institutions that provided the equivalent of the first two years of college had been in existence in the United States since 1806, when Georgetown College offered "the Juniorate" (Quigly & Bailey, 2003, p. 11). These same types of institutions were created in Maryland and Missouri in the early 1800s. Originally founded in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they provided the foundation of seminary work, similar to the way the community colleges were developed to provide an academic foundation for university students (Quigly & Bailey, 2003). Shortly after the opening of Joliet Junior College, the presidents at The University of California at Berkeley and Stanford University fought for separate two-year colleges that could feed into their colleges for the last two years. They also saw it as a way to weed out those students who would not be successful. Due to the efforts of these presidents, California approved legislation in 1907 that allowed for the development of community colleges as a new entrance to higher education (Zwerling, 1973).

Student enrollment growth in the community colleges came from multiple avenues. From the first college in 1901, the United States had 330 community colleges in 1950. Twenty years later, the number almost tripled to 909 (Vaughan, 2006). The growth has been much slower in the last 40 years. In 2017, there were 1,108 community colleges in the United States (AACC, 2017). Two national actions in the 1940s directly impacted this growth in community college: The G.I. Bill and the Truman Commission

on Higher Education. As enrollment skyrocketed at all institutions, community colleges were now beginning to be considered avenues of access for more students. The 1944 G. I. Bill of Rights increased the need for "terminal education" as more of the "transfer-minded students now wanted even more terminal courses and the AAJC [American Association of Junior Colleges] was there to encourage colleges to make the necessary adjustments to their curriculum" (Zwerling, 1973, p. 54). Additionally, the 1947 Truman Commission on Higher Education put community colleges in the spotlight to support access for individuals, regardless of race, sex, religion, color, geographical location, or financial condition. The Commission proposed the increase in technical training, adult education, and basic preparation for transfer students. This established the fundamental mission of most community colleges today, which has now been expanded to include developmental education (Roueche & Roueche, 1993; Zwerling, 1973).

The local communities also guided the development of many junior colleges. They could be extensions of the high school to provide two additional years of education close to home, they could meet the needs of the local community to provide additional educational and civic opportunities, or they could be developed to meet the needs of local industries as the United States moved from an agricultural to manufacturing country (Quigly & Bailey, 2003). While they began as "junior" colleges, seen as either an extension of the high school or a subordinate to the "senior" universities, the colleges were much more responsive to the needs of their local constituents. This led to the change in terminology from junior colleges to "community" colleges, with many more missions than just those of technical and transfer students (Thelin, 2004). Today that

mission creep continues with some of these institutions referred to simply as “college” as they begin to offer baccalaureate degrees in high need areas like nursing and management for technical fields.

Since community colleges are so responsive to the needs of their local communities, they have numerous functions. Most attempt to meet the following missions. First, they fulfill academic transfer needs. Students can earn credit at a community college and then transfer those credits to a four-year institution, thus maintaining one of the early structures where the first two years are completed at the community college, allowing the university to focus on the last two years. The second function is occupational education. These programs prepare students for careers immediately after two years or less of technical training. The third function, continuing education, has allowed community colleges to be responsive to the diverse needs of their community. These frequently include courses outside the traditional curriculum or schedule of traditional education like cake decorating or conversational Italian and other life-long learning experiences. Developmental education is the fourth function. While remedial coursework has been offered since Harvard opened in 1636, it has grown dramatically as more students who would have typically not attended college are now enrolling, frequently without the basic English and mathematic skills necessary to be successful at the college level. Community service, the fifth function, references the numerous activities and workshops that community colleges provide to the local community including small business seminars and fine arts performances. Since their inception, community colleges have tried to balance all of these functions while

maintaining standards necessary to maintain accreditation and transferability of their academic coursework while also meeting the needs of their local community (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). As Cohen, Brawer, and Kisker (2013) summarize, "All education is general education. All education is potentially career enhancing. All education is for the sake of the broader community" (p. 30).

While the growth of community colleges has been staggering, there have been many critics. One of the most significant arguments against community colleges is the "cooling-out" theory presented by Clark (1960). Clark explained that "the cooling-out process in higher education is one whereby systematic discrepancy between aspiration and avenue is covered over and stress for the individual and the system is minimized. . . . The general result of cooling-out processes is that society can continue to encourage maximum effort without major disturbance from unfulfilled promises and expectations" (Clark, 1960, p. 576). He lists five steps of the cooling-out process which begin with pre-testing and end with students being placed on probation after they do not perform successfully in the classes in which they choose to enroll. Zwerling (1973) suggests that while elite institutions focus on the success of their students, "the least selective open-door colleges are committed to their failure" (p. 37). He adds that researchers should not be surprised by the high dropout rates in community colleges: "Attrition then turns out *not* to be the problem, as just about everyone claims, but *to be one of the two-year college's primary social functions*" (p. 15). He states that "an important function for two-year colleges . . . has always been the development of followers, since their greatest service is in educating and training persons for the semiprofessional fields of

employment" (p. 17). These arguments suggest that community colleges present themselves as open-door institutions, providing access to all, but then close the door on goal attainment when the students are unable to perform at a successful level.

One of the strongest current critiques against community colleges is the developmental education funnel. Most students begin their educational journey in these remedial courses but few come out with a certificate or degree in the end. Numerous agencies such as The Gates Foundation, Complete College America, and Jobs for the Future, along with state legislative bodies, are pushing institutions to accelerate the process, moving students through the developmental education sequence faster so they don't get caught by the multiple levels and semesters needed to complete the standard program before even beginning earning college credit. Research has not yet determined if these approaches will result in more students successfully earning their degree or certificate at higher rates or in a shorter timeline. Studies have shown that developmental education has a different impact depending on demographic factors for the students (Bettinger, Boatman & Long, 2013; Clotfelter, Ladd, Muschkin & Vigdor, 2015; Xu, 2016). Due to these concerns, Florida's legislators eliminated the requirement of developmental education by deeming all students who started and graduated high school in the Florida public school system as college-ready. All remaining developmental education courses offered would be accelerated via multiple models. Early data shows that students were significantly less successful in the college-level courses than before implementation but student completion of the first college-level English and math course

has increased. It is too early for long-term results to determine whether the change will increase completion rates for all students (Brower, Jones, Tanberg, Hu & Park, 2017). Community colleges must accept the difficulties that are created with open-door access by providing support services to those same students, no matter their preparation or attainment of the skills necessary to be successful. “As viable educational institutions, community colleges assist individuals to become more effective, responsible members of society and help to provide a means of upward social and economic mobility for individuals of any age” (Roueche, Baker, OmahaBoy, & Mullins, 1978, p. 8). While Clark (1960) found a cooling-out impact for students who attended community colleges, Alexander, Bozick, and Entwisle (2008) found that attendance in community colleges can actually result in students “warm[ing] to the idea that a college degree is attainable” (p. 389). The question to be answered is what community colleges can do to create a warming up instead of a cooling down for the nation’s non-degreed adults.

Student Demographics

As students enter community colleges at higher and higher rates, it is important to have a clear understanding of who the students are in order to meet their needs. The most difficult part of this is that there is no “typical” community college student. Even while the growth of community colleges has leveled off in the past twenty years, student enrollment has skyrocketed until the last few years. From just over 160,000 students in 1950, enrollment doubled to almost 400,000 students by 1970. Then, just ten years later, enrollment grew to 2.1 million students (Thelin, 2004). From a percentage perspective, in 1971, approximately one-third of all entering students attended community colleges;

in 1992, more than half of all incoming students attended community colleges (Roueche & Roueche, 1993). In Fall 2015, enrollment in public community colleges had reached 12.2 million total and 7.2 million enrolled in credit courses which was 41% of all undergraduates in the United States (AACC Fast Facts, 2017). A third of these students are first-generation students and typically live at home and come from working-class and lower-middle class families (AACC Fast Facts, 2017; Thelin, 2004; Zwerling, 1973). Furthermore, the percentage of minority students is significant in community colleges. In 1997, 38% of all students were enrolled in community colleges, but 46% of all minorities were in these institutions. The rates typically match the local community (Cohen, Brawer, and Kisker, 2013).

With so many students, community colleges have difficulty meeting those students' individual needs. One way that is evidenced is by the difficulty of determining the goals of incoming students. How many of them were attending with the goal to transfer to a four-year institution versus those students who intended to earn a certificate or associates degree as their terminal degree? State legislators have difficulties in approving funding for community colleges at a significant rate, especially when the campuses are "devoid of the extracurricular learning and living experiences that [are] so crucial in enhancing cognitive skills and changes in attitudes and values" (Thelin, 2004, p. 301). In fact, some states are dramatically reducing funding to all higher education, including Arizona that eliminated all state funding for community colleges in 2015 (Smith, 2015).

Students who enroll at the community college are not guaranteed success. In a study from 2006, only 17% of students who began in a community college ended up earning ten credits within eight years after their high school graduation. A third of the same students earned more than ten credits but no certificate or degree or transferred to a four-year institution. While a third of the students ended up earning a bachelor degree (18%) or an associate (15%) and 6% earned a certificate, too many students left college without any earned diploma after initial enrollment (Bailey & Morest, 2006). Many of the students who attend community colleges are at risk of failing from the time they enroll. In 1993, Roueche and Roueche defined at risk students as those who are underprepared, work more than thirty hours a week, have limited family support, and are first-generation students. "Major recurring criticisms of community colleges turn on the notion that by attempting to serve everyone, regardless of interest, achievement, and ability, and that by spreading themselves thin along a continuum of programs and functions, these colleges serve all students less well" (Roueche & Roueche, 1993, p. 29).

Expectedly, students in community colleges typically have lower academic skills than those attending four-year universities. The question lies in whether the community colleges provide higher education opportunities to students who would have never had that opportunity, even if they end up not earning a degree, or whether the presence of a community college actually creates a barrier to the same students by limiting their access to four-year universities and, thereby, lowering their chance of earning a baccalaureate (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). Because there is so much diversity in the student body, institutions have had difficulty in using traditional methods of measuring student

persistence and success. Some critics suggested that rather than the "open door" that community colleges profess themselves to be, they were becoming "revolving-door" colleges or providing a "cooling-out" function, weeding out the students who are not equipped for college-level performance (Roueche, Baker, OmahaBoy, & Mullins, 1987; Clark, 1960).

Recent research has tried to understand why students do not return. As Cohen, Brawer, and Kisker (2013) explain, students drop out for a variety of reasons, most of which are outside of the control of the colleges themselves. Their work schedule changes, they encounter family difficulties (conflicts, lack of daycare, lack of transportation), they have financial barriers, or numerous other issues. Some of these students make their decision to leave very early in the semester. According to Kangas (1991), 71 percent of the students he interviewed who had withdrawn from their classes stated they thought about leaving in the first four weeks of the semester and 85 percent never spoke to their instructor about their decision. In another study that same year, Lucas and Meltesen (1991) found that only 8 percent of students said the institution was in any way responsible for the student's decision to leave. Consistently, though, these same students showed no sort of engagement with any employee of the institution (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013).

In response to the research that students come to college underprepared, Conley (2005, 2010) has looked at what it takes for high school students to be "college ready." He found that students needed to continue to be challenged throughout their four years of high school, gaining core curriculum foundations, especially strong reading and

writing skills, scientific knowledge, and quantitative reasoning. They also needed to be able to accept critiques on written work or presentations. Other skills they needed were an understanding of their abilities within their courses and the ability to adapt their work based upon what they needed to do to succeed. Socially, they needed to be able to work well with others, either classmates or faculty and staff from the college. Additionally, they needed a basic understanding of how college works so they can navigate their way through their first year and beyond.

Tinto's study of attrition rates (1993), found that almost half of all students did not return the following year at community colleges while that number was only a quarter in four-year institutions. He noted some specific differences in student characteristics, including the fact that community college students typically do not walk in with as high of educational goals as those in four-year institutions. Additionally, even when they do plan to attain high degrees, they are more likely to leave before finishing. He does note that the student demographics confirming that students typically do not have the same type of academic preparedness often leads to these results. To respond to these numerous issues, the American Association of Community Colleges has recently implemented the AACC Pathways Project which encourages colleges to create guided academic and career pathways to accelerate their transfer to four-year universities or to the workforce (AACC, 2017).

The First-Year Experience

In 1990, Upcraft and Gardner published *The Freshman Year Experience: Helping Students Survive and Succeed in College*. This brought the concept of the

importance of helping students during their critical first year of college to the forefront. They wrote this in response to a Carnegie report entitled *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* which recommended institutions of higher education to incorporate retention strategies for freshmen students, including strong orientation programs, better advising and counseling, increased interaction between faculty and students, and an orientation course that would count for college credit (Boyer, 1987). This recommendation led many institutions and researchers to look more closely at the FYE courses that had been implemented in some colleges.

These FYE courses have been called many different things and have had different learning outcomes. Some are simply orientation courses that introduce students to their college and help them meet individuals from numerous departments on the campus. Some are a brief course that incorporates study skills and other items that have been shown to help students succeed. Some institutions have implemented year-long freshmen experiences which put students in learning communities and focuses on similar topics throughout their entire first year. Gardner defined the term "first-year experience" as "a national and international effort to improve the first year, the total experience of students—and to do this intentionally and by rethinking the way the first year was organized and executed" (Schroeder, 2003, p. 10). Upcraft and Gardner (1990) suggest that the goals of such a program should be to help students "fulfill their educational and personal goals" through (p. 2):

1. developing academic and intellectual competence,
2. establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships,

3. developing identity,
4. deciding on a career and life-style,
5. maintaining personal health and wellness, and
6. developing an integrated philosophy of life

The freshman seminar has shown itself as the most effective way to meet these goals. When students are bored, do not see a relevance to what they are doing in their courses, have unrealistic expectations of college, are academically unprepared, have difficulties transitioning to all of the changes, and are uncertain about their major or career, they have a higher likelihood of dropping out of college. Without having the skills and knowledge they need to succeed, students risk not fulfilling their academic goals (Levitz & Noel, 1990; Tinto, 1993; Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

To meet these goals, most courses focus on integrating the students to the college, their instructors, and their classmates. Braxton (2000) explains that "academic integration reflects a student's experience with the academic systems and academic communities of a college or university" (p. 571). To help with the integration process, FYE classes are typically small groups to encourage the interactions between students and the instructor and among the students themselves. This small group structure also encourages "social and cultural activities" (Gordon, 1990, p. 194).

History of First-Year Experience Courses

While most of the research on FYEs has been completed within the last twenty years, FYE seminars have been around since the late nineteenth century (Schroeder, 2003). Gordon (1990) discusses one of the earliest orientation courses offered at Reed

College in 1911. This course, “The College Life Course,” incorporated instruction on how the college works such as “the purpose of college, the college curriculum, the individual plan of study, student honesty, student government, intercollegiate athletics, and college religion” (p. 185). These topics, for the most part, are similar to the topics in most FYE courses today.

The growth of FYE courses was rapid in the early twentieth century. In 1916 there were six orientation courses offered throughout the United States. By 1926, that number had grown to 82. These early versions were created to help freshmen “find themselves” as suggested by a Carnegie Foundation bulletin (Gordon, 1990, p. 185). Each campus focused on those components that they felt was most important for their individual students. For the most part, though, these early versions all focused on college life in general and how to function at the institution. During this period of growth, three types of courses were found. The first was an adjustment type of course which focused on introducing the students to “organization and administration of the college, . . . intellectual habits, and the freshman curriculum” (p. 185). The second type was an intellectual type where students focused on introducing students to “reflective thinking” and “how to study” (p. 185-6). The final type focused on social and intellectual orientations. These courses “focused on social problems, religion, humanities, and government” (p. 186).

Interestingly, many of the problems that institutions face while trying to implement FYE courses today were asked of the institutions in the 1920s. Gordon

(1990) cited a study by Fitts and Swift from 1928 which listed questions the universities were trying to answer (p. 186-7):

- What constitutes a fitting title or name?
- In which department should such a course be taught?
- Who should direct the course?
- Which methods of instruction should be used (lecture, discussion, or a combination of the two)?
- What instructional personnel should assist with the course (faculty or administrators)?
- What is the place of an orientation course in the college curriculum (should it be required or an elective)?
- What should be used?

The answers to these questions typically were unique to each institution and their goals for their students.

The growth of FYE courses continued in the period between the world wars. In 1930, a third of all colleges offered the courses. By 1938, ninety percent of all freshmen were required to enroll in an FYE. Studies showed that the courses were beneficial to students. Those who had taken the course knew more about college life than those who did not. Also, as early versions of active learning techniques such as discussion, laboratories, and small group strategies were introduced, studies showed that students who learned from these techniques retained more than those who were taught by traditional lecture (Gordon, 1990).

While the first half of the twentieth century showed rapid growth in FYE courses, institutions started questioning the need for such classes. Faculty objected to requiring students to take a course and earn credit for "life adjustment" material (Gordon, 1990, p. 188). Additionally, the courses required more of instructors because it was student-driven rather than traditional lecture. The planning and involvement needed to create a positive classroom that drew in the students to actively participate in their own growth was more demanding than faculty had been used to. Because of these and other reasons, "by the mid-1960s the orientation course had become nearly obsolete" (p. 188).

Beginning in the 1970s, a revival of the FYEs began. As different types of students began attending universities, especially "older adults, first-generation students, and less academically prepared students" (Gordon, 1990, p. 188), the universities brought back the FYE courses to assist students with the transition to college life. The courses were similar in content to the previous courses, but institutions became more focused on training for the faculty. Since the course content naturally led to more personal relationships between faculty and students, the need to provide instructors the necessary training to help students reach their goals became more critical.

Description of Today's First-Year Experience Courses

By the early nineties, FYE courses were in 80 percent of four-year institutions and 62 percent of community colleges (Schroeder, 2003). These courses are using best-practices to determine their content. Barefoot (2000) provided the following list of objectives found in most FYEs (p. 14).

- Increasing student-to-student interaction
- Increasing faculty-to-student interaction, especially out of class
- Increasing student involvement and time on campus
- Linking the curriculum and co-curriculum
- Increasing academic expectations and levels of academic engagement
- Assisting students who have insufficient academic preparation for college

The primary focus is on interaction, focusing on Tinto's and Astin's theories of student integration that suggest that students succeed when they are socially and academically integrated with the academic community (Tinto, 1993; Astin, 1995, 2003). Karp, Hughes, and O'Gara (2010) referred to the interaction students encountered in FYE programs as "information networks [which] . . . allow students to navigate the campus environment, access knowledge about the college, create a sense of social belonging, and, ultimately, feel that there are people who care about their academic welfare" (p. 84). Numerous research supports the importance of student integration, and FYE programs have incorporated that integration into their courses (Karp, Hughes, & O'Gara, 2010; Hawley & Harris, 2005; Gordon, 1990; Levitz & Noel, 1990; O'Gara, Karp, & Hughes, 2009).

Gordon suggests that there are basically two different kinds of FYE programs, the orientation courses and the freshman seminar. Some institutions combine the two contents into one course. The orientation courses focus on student development issues and incorporate time management and study skills in conjunction with an understanding of how the college functions. Duggan and Williams (2011) suggests that three goals of

these types of courses include developing essential academic skills, providing orientation to the college, and easing the transition to the college. Typically, instructors of orientation courses are taught by non-faculty, including advisors, student service personnel, and administrators. Generally, this type of FYE class "includes helping students understand the connections between curricular experiences and personal development" (p. 191). These courses are frequently also called student success courses (Karp, Hughes, and O'Gara, 2010).

In contrast, according to Gordon (1990), are the freshman seminars. These courses "introduce the student to the nature and value of a liberal education" (p. 192-193). Rather than focusing on personal development and the skills a student needs to succeed in college, the freshman seminars give students an understanding of what higher education can provide to students. Gordon lists the topics that are typically presented in the freshman seminar courses (p. 193):

- The value and benefits of higher education
- How to think and learn
- The nature of educational processes and the role and responses of students in these processes
- Cognitive, writing, communication, and library skills
- The curriculum, including general and major requirements
- Students' learning styles and how to apply this knowledge in and out of the classroom
- Critical reasoning and problem solving.

Frequently, these courses are part of the students' core curriculum or subject-matter and are taught by faculty. One goal can be to help students understand their chosen discipline and become confident in what they need to be able to achieve their best. This epistemological approach is very different from the success-focused orientation-type courses.

No matter the type of course, one of the most important factors is the instructor. Levitz and Noel (1990) found that freshman consistently used the same words when they define their favorite teachers. They call this "'the magic formula of teaching': *like, learn,* and *help*." Gardner, in his interview with Schroeder (2003) suggested that the courses that students enjoyed the most utilized "*engaging pedagogies*" (p. 13). This puts the focus on the instructor's behavior instead of the students' behavior. It also includes using student learners. Therefore, training of the FYE faculty is an integral component of successful programs (Gordon, 1990; Schoeder, 2003; Roueche, Baker, OmahaBoy & Mullins, 1987).

Effectiveness of First-Year Experience Courses in Four-Year Institutions

Researchers have been studying the effectiveness of FYE programs within four-year institutions for many years. Most discussion of FYEs focuses on the experiences of traditional students in traditional universities. Overall, the research shows that these courses are worth the effort. While individual research has been done, Gardner acknowledged that "there has never been a nationally produced, readily available instrument to evaluate the effectiveness of these courses" (Schroeder, 2003, p. 13). The National Resource Center for First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, housed

at South Carolina University, has published reports showing the latest updates from numerous institutions who have implemented FYE programs. In 1998, they presented the results of the fifty programs at universities, including seven community colleges, throughout the United States. Overall, they found that "retention rates improve, grades improve, students' internal locus of control increases, participation in extracurricular activities and the use of campus services both increase, and students begin to classify their short- and long-term goals. Most importantly, graduation rates increase" (Barefoot, Warnock, Dickinson, Richardson, & Roberts, 1998, p. xi). While not all research supports that FYE programs at four-year universities improve student retention and success, most research shows the programs are beneficial in one way or another to the students.

Boudreau & Kromrey (1994) completed a longitudinal study of the effects a freshman orientation course had on student retention and academic performance. They studied students who had completed an orientation course at Ohio University compared to students who did not complete the course over a ten year period. Their results showed that, almost every year, students who had completed the course had higher end-of-year GPAs, higher retention rates, and higher graduation rates. Belcheir (1997) completed a shorter study at Boise State University to evaluate the effectiveness of a cluster program where students had to enroll in a learning community which included an FYE seminar. They compared 57 cluster students to 102 students who were enrolled in the same courses but not part of the cluster group and not enrolled in the FYE seminar. Belcheir found that the students who completed the cluster program in the fall were more likely to

re-enroll in the following spring and the following fall than were the students who were part of the control group.

In 1998, Fernandez, Whitlock, Martin, and VanEarden, evaluated an FYE pilot program at Assumption College in Massachusetts. This program was developed for students who had low test scores which suggested a lack of academic preparedness. They were enrolled in a three-course learning community and met with a faculty member once a week. When compared to similar students who had not been enrolled in the program, the students in the FYE program had lower attrition rates and had a higher end-of-year GPA. Additionally, they found that the students were more sociable with their classmates but not necessarily more engaged with the institution. In another longitudinal study, Schnell and Doetkott (2003) found that students who participated in an FYE had significantly greater student retention than those of similar academic abilities who had not participated in the program. Additionally, the graduation rate was higher for those who had completed the program, even among those who had lower ACT scores and high school GPAs than their non-participating counterparts.

While these early studies showed positive impact to students enrolled in an FYE course, later studies showed no impact. In 2006, two studies published in the same journal presented results that were not as positive. Cavote and Kopera-Frye (2006) studied an FYE program at the University of Nevada, Reno. They compared students who had enrolled in an FYE to those who had not. They also looked at whether the course would have a different impact on traditional versus non-traditional course. In a study of persistence over three semesters, the results did not show a significant lowering

of attrition rates for either group. Additionally, Hendel (2006) studied an FYE program at an unnamed research-intensive, land grant institute. In this logistic regression study of retention and student satisfaction, while results did show that students who had completed the FYE were more satisfied than those who had not participated in the course, retention rates were unchanged. Another study that found a limited positive effect for FYE participation was completed by Jamelske (2009). In this study at a Midwest public institution, students who completed the FYE program were not retained at a higher rank than those who had not participated. The study did find, however, that participation did result in a higher end-of-semester GPA. Also in 2009, Clark and Cundiff evaluated the University 101 course at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. This course is voluntary for all incoming freshmen, but is recommended for at-risk students. Their study did not find an increase in GPA and very limited increase in retention in their study of an FYE course at a four-year university.

More recent studies, however, are finding a positive impact for students enrolled in FYE courses. Schrader and Brown (2008) evaluated the effect an FYE program had on students' knowledge, attitude, and behavior. While behavior was not impacted, students did show an increase in knowledge. Additionally, they found that attitudes were positively impacted, especially for female students. In 2013, Rogerson and Poock looked at whether enrollment in an FYE course based upon major would have an impact on retention. Based upon 318 student survey responses from a Southeastern university, they found that such courses led to more peer-to-peer and student-to-faculty connections. They also found that retention rose 7% (76% compared to 83%) when students were in

major-specific FYE courses. Jenkins-Guarnieri, Horne, Wallis, Rings & Waughan (2015) found in their Rocky Mountain Region university study that FYE courses did lead to a higher persistence to the next semester and more students in good standing at the end of the semester. This course focused on student development more than campus resources and was not required. Finally, Connelly, Flynn, Jemmott & Oestreicher (2017) studied 40 at-risk students enrolled in an FYE course at a four-year university that included an assigned peer advisor, a requirement that all students attend at least three campus activities, and provided instruction in study skills. They found that the course increased the GPA for the students.

Effectiveness of First-Year Experience Courses in Community Colleges

Studies of first-year experience courses have been prolific in four-year universities, but not as common in community colleges. Because the student population is so different from those who attend traditional, four-year universities, FYE courses in the community college are a new concept and the format and results are unique to each campus. When dealing with a mix of students, including their age, academic preparedness, ethnicity, economic status, and all of the factors that make community college students diverse, first-year experience programs at the community college do not necessarily follow the same patterns as those at four-year universities.

Tinto (1993) presented the following retention strategies for incoming freshmen: learning communities, student activities, college bridge programs, and student services. He argued that these strategies integrated students into the college community which results in encouraging students to stay enrolled and reach their academic goals. While

Tinto himself argues that his integration theory cannot work within community colleges, Karp, Hughes, and O'Gara (2010) found that students do integrate, academically and socially, with their community colleges through what they termed "information networks." These information networks, unlike those at four-year institutions, are typically created within the classroom environment. They note that one specific way these networks can be created is through student success courses (FYE). Those students who considered themselves integrated with the college had much higher persistence than the general enrollment.

Derby and Smith (2004) studied 9,500 community college students over a four-year period to determine what factors could be used as predictors of retention. While their study resulted in multiple predictors of retention, including developmental studies, online courses, and financial aid, it also found that orientation courses increased student retention and degree completion. Zeidenberg, Jenkins, and Calcagno (2007) collected data from all twenty-eight community colleges in Florida over seventeen terms. They compared students who had completed the Florida FYE program to those who had not. Their results showed that students who had completed the program were more likely to complete their credentials, had a greater persistence, and a higher transfer rate to a four-year Florida institution. The most dramatic results came from Derby (2007) who found that graduation rates increased by 72 percent for students who completed an orientation course at the community college she studied in contrast to students who did not complete the course.

O'Gara, Karp, and Hughes (2009) also found positive results of an FYE program in community colleges. They interviewed students who had completed a student success course at two community colleges and found that students felt that a student success course provided multiple benefits. The students reported that they learned about the college and courses, improved their study skills, and developed significant relationships. In fact, some students said they were "actually *using* college services as a result of the college success course" (p. 215). O'Gara, Karp, and Hughes could not determine whether students received the most benefits from the academic advising component of the course or from the actual course content. The researchers conclude that "our findings provide evidence that this class is a key component in helping students adjust to the community college" (p. 216). Duggan and Williams (2011) also supported the positive impact FYE programs can have on community college students, but they found that the results were dependent upon many factors. The course was not beneficial to all students and they suggested needed individualization based upon student needs. Non-traditional students received the greatest benefits from the course in compared to traditional-aged students.

Cho and Karp (2013) studied students enrolled in a required student success course within the Virginia Community College System to determine if they course would improve success rates for those students. They found that enrollment into a student success course within the first 15 semester hours resulted in a 10% increase in persistence and an increase in course attainment. In their 2017 study, Karp, Raugman, Efthimiou & Ritze completed a comparative study of students enrolled in the First Year

Seminar at Bronx Community College to those who had not enrolled in any student success course. They found that the students in the seminar had the opportunity to practice the study skills they were introduced to and that they were able to transfer those skills to other classes. Also in 2017 Kimbark, Peters & Richardson studied students enrolled in a student success course in Texas who responded to the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). They found a positive relationship between enrollment in a student success course in the community college and persistence, retention, and academic achievement. The students also felt they were more engaged with the institution. While most of the current research shows at least a limited positive impact for community college students who take an FYE course, the limited research does not provide a definitive conclusion.

Conclusion

Community colleges have become a topic of national discussions recently, especially under former President Obama's higher education plans. The colleges have to find a way to balance their open-doors mission with the need to increase the number of students who persist and graduate with a certificate or degree. A strategy that many institutions have implemented is some form of an FYE course. While this course has been most prolific at four-year universities, community colleges have looked at ways to incorporate and adapt the course for their own students and their unique needs. The research is beginning to show that such courses have a positive impact on students, but more evidence is still needed.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

This study will utilize qualitative research methods for data collection and analysis. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state that "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). This socially constructed interpretation allows the researcher a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The researcher creates a "complex, holistic picture" of the subject of inquiry (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). To create this holistic picture, Patton (2002) details three types of qualitative data the researcher can gather: in-depth, open-ended interviews, direct observation, and written documents. Since so many factors can impact a community college student's success in college, I felt that a qualitative study would allow me to explore the perceptions students had with their first-year experience (FYE) course and the impact it had on them as students overall.

Statement of the Research Question

My research will answer the following question: What are the perceptions of first-time-in-college students regarding the impact a first-year experience course at a campus of a large community college system had on their persistence in higher education? Sub-questions will be posed to determine the perceived outcome students' attendance and completion of the course had on the students. These include questions about the content of the course, the particularly useful components of the course for their

goals, and the impact it had on students' persistence in higher education. Additionally, the role of intrusive advising will be analyzed to determine if that component had an impact on students' retention and persistence in higher education.

Theoretical Tradition

This research study will utilize a ethnographic approach. Patton (2002) defines phenomenology as "a focus on exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning" (p. 104). To reach this level of understanding, detailed interviews of participants with respect to a specific phenomenon are required. In this instance, I interviewed ten former students of the FYE course to gather data regarding the way they "perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 104).

To prepare for this ethnographic study, I had to "bracket" by own experiences and assumptions about the first-year experience course (Merriam, 2009, p. 25). To understand how others interpret an experience, the researcher must acknowledge her own assumptions and beliefs about that same experience and attempt to set those views aside. For this study, I stayed focused on acknowledging and avoiding any biases or prejudices throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Additionally, the questions used for the interviews were created for all interviews in consultation with my dissertation committee chair to confirm that I had removed any personal biases prior to the data collection.

To gain a detailed understanding of students' perceptions of the FYE course, I conducted a case study. The phenomenon studied was the course and what impact it had on the students. To gain a thorough understanding of this case, I had to gather data on "the nature of the case, particularly its activity and functioning; its historical background; its physical setting; other contexts, such as economic, political, legal, and aesthetic; other cases through which this case is recognized; and those informants through whom the case can be known" (Stake, 2005, p. 447). By interviewing ten students who had completed the course, I gained many of these details.

Site and Sample Selection

Purposeful sampling was used to provide the best sample to gain insights into student perceptions of the FYE program. Merriam (2009) explains that "purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 77). According to Patton (2002), the analysis based upon this data will "yield two kinds of findings: (1) high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case, which are useful for documenting uniqueness, and (2) important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity" (p. 235).

The selection criteria for student participation in this study are discussed below. The focus of this study was to determine the perceptions of the FYE course by students who were in college for the first time. This means that the only students involved in the sample must have been enrolled in EDUC 1300 during their first semester of college, and they could not have received any college credit prior to the semester they enrolled in

EDUC 1300. The second criterion was that they must have completed the intrusive advising component of the course. Intrusive advising required two visits with an Advisor II to learn about the benefits of effective advising and goal-setting and to create a degree plan. The third criterion was that the student must have earned a grade of A, B, or C in the class. While it would be interesting to gain insights from those students who did not successfully complete the course, that will need to be saved for another study.

The site selected for this study was Lone Star College-Tomball and Lone Star College-University Park which, at the time the students were enrolled in EDUC 1300, was a satellite campus of Tomball. At the time of this study, this was a campus of almost 11,000 students within the Lone Star College System, which now serves almost 90,000 students in the northwest suburbs of Houston, Texas. The college system, the largest in the state of Texas, represents the struggles a large, multi-campus system encounters when implementing new programs. In Fall 2009, there were 3 sections with a total enrollment of 47 at the Tomball campus and 4 sections with a total enrollment of 48 at the University Park campus; in Fall 2010, the enrollment grew to 6 sections with 132 students at Tomball and 8 sections with 132 students at University Park. These 359 students were then narrowed down to the 196 students who met the selection criteria from which ten participants were selected. To recruit students into the study, the 196 students who met the criteria were emailed at their Lone Star College email address twice. While that resulted in six of the participants volunteering, I then called each student's phone to invite them to participate. This resulted in finding the ten students who agreed to be interviewed.

This study is not designed to be a representative of all FYE courses or even those within the community colleges. Each college has its own design and goals for its first-year experience courses and the diversity of students from college to college limit the transferability of the results. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain, the "degree of *transferability* is a direct function of the *similarity* between the two contexts, what we shall call *fittingness*." They define fittingness as "the degree of congruence between sending and receiving context" (p. 124). The reader can gain an understanding of how students perceived EDUC 1300 at Lone Star College-Tomball and determine which components fit their own context and which do not.

Researcher's Role Management

I completed this study as an observer. My goal was to interview students who completed the FYE course to gather data on their retention in college. My access to the FYE course at Lone Star College-Tomball came from my current role as an administrator at the community college. At the time of the study, I was the Dean of Education, English, Humanities, and Mathematics at Lone Star College-Tomball and served as the administrator for EDUC 1300 at the college. I also served as the facilitator for the Lone Star College EDUC 1300 curriculum team. This system-wide committee included representatives from each campus of LSC and was responsible for developing and maintaining the instructional guidelines and learning outcomes for the course at all locations. These roles allowed me to have access to how the course was developed and implemented at LSC-Tomball.

I have direct access to the personnel involved with the course and the approval process at Lone Star College-Tomball. The President at LSC-Tomball at the time, Dr. Susan Karr, supported my dissertation topic and voiced an interest in the outcome of the study. I was the supervisor of the department chair over EDUC 1300, Dr. Donna Willingham. My own access to our student records database per LSC IRB approval (see Appendix B) process provided me the list of students who completed the course in Fall 2009 and Fall 2010 to interview.

Reciprocity

To meet my needs as a researcher, I must consider the needs of the participants when gathering data. This includes the concept of reciprocity. Patton (2002) discusses the difficulty researchers can encounter when trying to determine whether or not to pay participants, in some form or another, for their time and involvement. For this study, I offered participants a drink for our interview time to make them feel more comfortable during the interview.

Ethics

Ethical issues are an additional concern for this study. Patton (2002) provides a checklist of potential ethical issues for the researcher to consider. The participant consent form (see Appendix A) fulfilled many of the requirements of the checklist, specifically providing the information the participants need to know (purpose, reciprocity, risk assessment, confidentiality, data access, and ownership issues) in order for them to make an informed decision to consent to the interview process. To maintain

confidentiality, I coded all data to allow participants to remain anonymous to readers. The only person I shared the data with was my dissertation committee chair.

Researcher Strategies

The research for my study began by gaining a greater understanding of how EDUC 1300 is taught at Lone Star College-Tomball. To begin, I reviewed the learning outcomes for the course and verified how the course was implemented. Additionally, I reviewed course syllabi (see Appendix C) and spoke with faculty to determine what teaching strategies were used to fulfill the learning outcomes. Since two meetings were required with an Advisor II, I also learned what was required of those meetings and how it relates to the learning outcomes of the course. Finally, to see the impact the course has had on students, I gathered data on student performance in the course, including the final grades, the completion of the advising component, and the persistence of the students to the next semester.

To gain a greater understanding of how EDUC 1300 fits as an FYE course, I completed a review of the literature on FYE courses. Most of this research has been done at four-year institutions, but I also reviewed the literature that exists on FYEs in the community college. This research allowed me to see where Lone Star College-Tomball's EDUC 1300 fit into the national framework of other FYE programs at all institutions of higher education and, specifically, at community colleges.

With the data from the interviews, I began gathering documentation to provide another input on how the EDUC 1300 course impacted students. This required access to student data to review their academic performance. To gain a better understanding of the

students, I looked at the students' GPA during the semester they enrolled in EDUC 1300 along with their GPA at Lone Star College. This information was analyzed in conjunction with the interviews to assertain a fuller understanding of how the EDUC 1300 course impacted students and their performance and persistence in higher education.

Emergent Design

The nature of qualitative research requires an emergent design rather than a prescribed (a priori) research design. As the researcher gathers data, that data can frequently require changes in the approaches of the researcher. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe, "The very requirement of an emergent design, in which succeeding methodological steps are based upon the results of steps already taken, implies the presence of a continuously interacting and interpreting investigator" (p. 102). As data are gathered, they are analyzed and themes emerge. Those themes then lead to new questions during interviews or the search for specific documents to add to the understanding of the data.

Interviews

Ten students who completed EDUC 1300 in Fall 2010 and who meet other outlined requirements were interviewed using an interview guide and informal conversation.

1. Enrolled in EDUC 1300 during their first semester in college.
2. Completed the intrusive advising component of the course.
3. Earned an A, B, or C in the class.

Each interview began with an interview guide for all participants. This allowed consistency among the interviews to confirm that certain questions were asked of all participants. The flexibility, though, provided me the ability to respond to each individual and make the student comfortable to share his or her perceptions of the experience in EDUC 1300. While completing the questions from the interview guide, a more informal conversation was used. As Patton (2002) explains, "the conversational interview offers maximum flexibility to pursue information in whatever direction appears to be appropriate, depending on what emerges from observing a particular setting or from talking with one or more individuals in that setting" (p. 342). Since each individual's experiences were different, this allowed me to respond to the unique perceptions of each participant and gain additional data.

These interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Additionally, as back-up and to provide supporting data, notes were taken. Participants gave written approval to be recorded and these recordings and transcriptions are kept locked within my home office. The questions were developed based upon the research on FYE courses. Additionally, my research on the EDUC 1300 courses at LSC-Tomball and my own experiences added to the question development. The interview guide can be seen in Appendix D.

Assuring Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss the importance of establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research. They provide a list of four questions researchers should ask of themselves to assure the trustworthiness of their research (p. 290):

(1) Truth value: How can one establish confidence in the "truth" of the findings of a particular inquiry for the subjects (respondents) with which and the context in which the inquiry was carried out?

(2) Applicability: How can one determine the extent to which the findings of a particular inquiry have applicability in other contexts or with other subjects (respondents) and provide transferability?

(3) Consistency: How can one determine whether the findings of an inquiry will be repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) subjects (respondents) in the same (or similar) context?

(4) Neutrality: How can one establish the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are determined by the subjects (respondents) and conditions of the inquiry and not by the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the inquirer?

To answer the first question about truth value, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that prolonged engagement is an excellent tool to establish the truth of the data. They define prolonged engagement as "the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the 'culture,' testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents, and building trust" (p. 301). This was accomplished through interviews that will occur over a prolonged period of time. The interviews were completed between the Spring 2012 through the Fall 2014 semester. While there was not a required length for the interviews, the interview protocol and the open-ended questions led to each interview lasting anywhere from 30-45 minutes. While

numerous questions were asked to prompt students to give detailed feedback of their experiences, the majority of the students were uncomfortable with the process so gave brief answers, even after additional encouragement and prodding. Furthermore, some of those interviews occurred a few years after the students completed the course; they frequently did not remember all of the details. The multiple participants helped eliminate any distortions presented by a single participant.

The second question dealt with the applicability of the analysis to similar contexts. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain, transferability for a qualitative study falls upon the final user. In the case study provided, I have presented a thick description that will allow the readers to determine whether the context which I describe matches a context they are evaluating. The similarities of the contexts, or "fittingness," determine what amount of the results might be transferable (p. 124)

Third was the issue of consistency. In qualitative research, researchers are not able to replicate a study in exactly the same manner. The participants and the context of the study will always create differences. One way, however, to allow readers a way to see exactly how the study was done so that an individual could attempt to repeat the same study in a different context is, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe, through an audit trail. Merriam (2009) explains that "An audit trail in a qualitative study describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry" (p. 223).

To provide an audit trail, I maintained a reflexive journal throughout the study. The journal began with the research design and was updated throughout the study. This

audit trail includes a written journal detailing my reflections, questions, and decisions made throughout the data collection and analysis stages. The journal provided a benefit to me, as the researcher, by allowing me to think about my actions and my decisions during the data collection and analysis. Additionally, it will allow a reader to follow my thought processes and replicate the study as much as possible in his or her own context.

Finally, neutrality must be considered. To confirm that I maintained objectivity throughout the study, I incorporated peer debriefing and member checks. Peer debriefing, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is "a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). I engaged in peer debriefings with my dissertation committee chair and fellow graduate students throughout the study. These sessions allowed me to voice my discoveries and working hypotheses to keep me on track and focused.

Additionally, I completed member checks with the participants. Throughout the interview process, I informally confirmed with the participants that my understanding of their comments matched their intention. After transcribing the interview, I incorporated a more formal member check, which allowed each participant to read the transcript and provided them an opportunity to make any edits, corrections, deletions, or clarifications they felt were needed to accurately represent their intentions. None of the participants provided any feedback, comments, or changes. This final step helps confirm that I have presented and analyzed the perceptions of the participants, not just my own representation.

Data Analysis Strategies

In order to have data worth analyzing, the first step is to ensure that "thick description" has been used (Geertz, 1973, p. 6). Patton (2002) defines thick description as the way "qualitative studies share the capacity to open up a world to the reader through rich, detailed, and concrete descriptions of people and places . . . in such a way that we can understand the phenomenon studied and draw our own interpretations about meanings and significance" (page). In order to understand a phenomenon fully, the description must provide the full picture. That then allows the researcher to develop a reasonably accurate interpretation. For, as Geertz (1973) explains, "A good interpretation of anything . . . takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation" (p. 18). Data was collected through interviews with the ten participants. The group was a random representation of the diversity of the students at Lone Star College-Tomball. Table 1 gives a view of who the students were.

Participant	Gender	Traditional/ Non-Traditional	First-Generation/ Multi-Generation	Major
One	Male	Traditional	First-Generation	Culinary Arts
Two	Female	Non-Traditional	First-Generation	Probation Officer
Three	Female	Traditional	Multi-Generation	Mechanical Engineering
Four	Female	Non-Traditional	Multi-Generation	Business
Five	Female	Traditional	First-Generation	Nursing
Six	Male	Non-Traditional	First-Generation	Occupational Therapist
Seven	Male	Traditional	First-Generation	Fire Fighter
Eight	Male	Traditional	Multi-Generation	Computer Science
Nine	Male	Traditional	First-Generation	Forensics
Ten	Male	Traditional	Multi-Generation	Undecided

Table 1. Participant details.

The details provide some details to understand the differences among the participants such as their gender and declared major. Additionally noted is whether the students are of a traditional age (18-24) or non-traditional age (25+) and whether they are the first in their family to attend college (first-generation) or if a parent or grandparent had attended some form of post-secondary education (multi-generation).

To analyze the data, I have used the constant comparative method as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). This process requires the researcher to analyze data through the entire data collection process until the final report is written. As Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) explain,

> a naturalistic study involved an inseparable relationship between data collection and data analysis. . . . One effect of this continuous adjustment process is that as data are gathered, they are analyzed. Data analysis frequently necessitates revisions in data collection procedures and strategies. These revisions yield data that are then subjected to new analysis. The result of this process is the effective collection of rich data that generate alterative hypotheses and provide the basis for shared constructions of reality. (p. 114)

This constant comparative method allowed me to continuously analyze the data I received and make any changes to my hypotheses or my questions to result in the best reconstruction of the event.

To make sure the data are accurate, I created accurate transcriptions of each interview, attempting to remove all biases and prejudices; I reported the experiences of

the participants. The statement of each participant was bracketed "so that the entire research process is rooted solely on the topic and the question" (p. 97).

Second, I unitized all relevant statements. Using the completed interview transcripts, the data are organized into units that "must be the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 354). In my study, the data analysis process began after the first interview was completed. Once that interview was done and the transcription typed, the data were divided into units and printed onto 4 X 6 inch index cards and coded with information about (1) the participant, (2) the date of interview, (3) gender, and (4) semester EDUC 1300 was taken. This process was repeated for every participant.

Next, the unitized 4 X 6 inch index cards were reviewed individually and placed into groups of common themes. Through this process, I discovered the themes that were presented by the participants' experiences in the phenomenon. Using the analyzed data, I then created a description of what happened in the experience, using examples from the participants (Creswell, 1998). This "portrayal is an abstraction of the experience that provides content and illustration" (Patton, 2002, p. 486). At this stage of my study, I developed a written description of what each participant experienced while enrolled in EDUC 1300 and the impact it had on the participant in regards to higher education. This detailed account provided context for the reader to understand the personal experiences of each participant.

Summary

As revealed through this chapter, qualitative research was the most fitting approach for my study, and the theoretical approach selected was phenomenology. The constant comparative method of analysis of ethnographic data was chosen for data analysis. Through this process, I was able to discover the common themes to determine students' perceptions of EDUC 1300 at Lone Star College-Tomball and University Park. The following chapter provides the findings from this data analysis.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The students in the study provided important insights into what did and did not matter to them in their EDUC 1300 classes at Lone Star College-Tomball and University Park. These ten students were randomly selected from the pool of students who successfully completed the course. The students represented the diversity of the students in community college and the numerous goals they had when they first began college. Their perceptions of the course regarding the impact it had on their persistence are detailed below.

Participants

Ten students who had been enrolled in EDUC 1300 at Lone Star College-Tomball and University Park in Fall 2010 were interviewed for this study. They were randomly selected from the pool of students who successfully completed the course. Of the ten students, six were male and four female which is the reverse of the current ratio of male to females in college. Three of the participants were non-traditional, or over twenty-five years of age, which does mirror the enrollment of Lone Star College's population.

Participant One is a first-generation, traditionally aged male. His parents financially supported his college enrollment. He originally came to school to make money and take his basics, so he thought he would be a nurse. He did not have any focus other than he needed to go to college so he could earn a lot of money later. At the time of

the interview, he had changed his goal to become a cook and open his own restaurant. He had no additional responsibilities beyond completing his coursework.

Participant Two was a first-generation, non-traditional female with children. When her oldest children began college, she followed suit, while still raising younger children at home. Her sisters have now also begun college after seeing her success and with her encouragement. Her original goal was forensic science but, after discovering the amount of math required, she changed her major to probation officer and planned to transfer to Sam Houston State University.

Participant Three was technically a traditionally aged student but she was a Katrina refugee (Hurricane Katrina had occurred in 2005). Her family moved from Louisiana to Houston where she was home schooled to complete her high school diploma. She was a very independent young lady who was paying her own way through school. Her original major was to become a registered nurse but she changed to a mechanical engineering student planning to transfer to the University of Texas

Participant Four was a non-traditional international student. She came from Canada to begin school after working different types of jobs in her hometown. She was an independent woman without children who originally was working toward a general business certificate but expanded her degree plan to complete her Associates of Arts degree in Business.

Participant Five was a traditionally aged female student who was part of Lone Star College-Tomball's TrIO program which supports first-generation and low-income students to be successful in completing their academic goals. When she first came to

college she was undecided on her major. She started school because her boyfriend was in college, so she thought she would join him. She changed her goal to anesthesiologist, but she was struggling academically and was on academic probation. She was trying to get into the nursing program but did not know what she would do if she did not get in the following semester.

Participant Six is a non-traditional male and also a Katrina refugee. He was a veteran who then had extensive work experiences in New Orleans before moving to Houston in 2005. After many years of trying different work fields, he decided to come back to school to become an occupational therapist. He was a TrIO student, along with his wife, as they also raised children at home. He was working toward transferring to complete a bachelor's degree at University of Houston or Sam Houston State University.

Participant Seven was a traditionally aged male who originally came to school to get his Associate of Arts in Criminal Justice and then transfer to Sam Houston State University. He changed his focus and, while he completes his Associate of Arts, he planned to join the Houston Fire Academy to become a fire fighter. He "might come back and finish up but for right now it's just not for me" (7.M10.02012013.45).

Participant Eight was a traditionally aged male whose parents completed college. He was an English language learner who came to college to get a computer science degree. He continued down that path and was transferring to University of Houston where he was already taking some classes in computer science.

Participant Nine was a first-generation traditionally aged male. His father attended a technical school. When he first came to college, he planned to earn a degree

in nutrition but subsequently planned to earn his Associate of Arts and transfer to Sam Houston State University for a degree in forensics.

Participant Ten was also a traditionally aged male whose parents attended college. He would not share much about his personal life other than to know he planned to get his basics and then transfer. He was still undecided in his major.

Perceptions on Persistence

This study proposes to answer the question: What are the perceptions of first-time-in-college students regarding the impact a First-Year Experience course at a large community college system had on their persistence in higher education? Lone Star College created EDUC 1300: Learning Frameworks in hopes to increase persistence for students coming to college. Numerous factors can impact students' decisions to continue in their pursuit of a certificate or a degree. The student success course provides curriculum and support in an intentional format to prepare students for college, help the students focus on their educational and career goals, and connect them to the services and individuals who can assist them on that path. But good intentions do not always result in good results. Hearing from students about how they perceived their experience in EDUC 1300 can allow community colleges to determine whether a student success course is an appropriate solution to increase persistence and, if so, what components of the course are most impactful.

Early Semester Impressions

When this study took place, EDUC 1300 was required for all first-time-in-college students who placed into two developmental education courses at Lone Star

College. One of the first assignments students had to complete was a scavenger hunt that introduced them to important locations around the campus. This tour familiarized them to both academic support locations like the tutoring center and library and student engagement support like the gym and the student activities office. Additionally, the students completed a career exploration project that had them take assessments to determine the best career for their personality and what type of lifestyle the career would provide them.

Mandated Enrollment

As students registered for classes, they were told they had to take EDUC 1300 if they were placed in two developmental education courses. Learning about their first impressions on having to taking the course provided some helpful information. The students took the course because they were told they had to, though one participant was frustrated by the mandate.

Participant Four was frustrated with having to take the course. “But as a requirement it’s a requirement and you’ve got to do what you’ve got to do” (04.F10.01272012.59). Then once she got into the course, she felt it was a waste of her time as an older student and that she knew everything in the class already. Participant Five was worried that the course was going to be hard, while Participant Seven was not happy that it was a required course. His grandfather was an advisor who said he had to take it, so he didn’t “think twice about it” but took it (07.M10.02012013.8) Participant Eight said he really did not have any thoughts about having to take the course. It was fine with him as it was a developmental course like the others he was taking.

Participant One did not know what the course was about. It did not make sense like English or Math, but he enrolled because he was told he had to. He really did not think about it much or question why he had to take it. Participant Two also did not know what she was getting into. She could not get into the math course she wanted to so the advisor recommended this course to maintain full-time status. Participant Three also enrolled because she was told it was required and considered it as just another pre-requisite like the others. Participant Nine called it "the guinea pig class" because it was for students in their first semester (09.M10.12092014.22).

Scavenger Hunt

One of the first assignments students complete in EDUC 1300 is a scavenger hunt. This activity requires students to walk around campus to find important locations that the institution believes can help students through their educational path. Seven participants provided feedback on the scavenger hunt. Four of these found the experience beneficial because they learned where some places were that they might have overlooked or never noticed. Participant Two learned that there was a gym on campus which she thought many students didn't know. The seven participants recalled the visit to the library and getting to learn how it worked. Participant Five found the assignment helpful because, being nervous, she was able to get a better sense of where things were on campus and what services were available. By being introduced to the tutoring center, she used it later for support in her writing and math classes. Participant Three said the scavenger hunt "made me feel more comfortable" (03.F10.04032012.53).

While one participant had mixed feelings about the assignment, three of them did not feel the activity was worthwhile. Participant Three commented that since the campus was fairly small, she wasn't sure how necessary the scavenger hunt was. Participant Nine echoed this perception. He said that the signs around campus made it easy to find whatever you needed so he felt the assignment was pretty basic. Participant Seven's recollection of the scavenger hunt was that his class worked together to find the locations as quickly as possible so they could enjoy an early release from class. Participant Four questioned why the instructor did not just take the students around the campus to show the places they needed to know instead of sending them off on their own. She acknowledged the goal was probably to make it fun, but it seemed like a waste to her.

Redefining Educational Goals

One of the major goals of EDUC 1300 and most FYE courses is for students to determine their academic major and educational goals. Students complete a career exploration paper that requires them to research information about their career choice, including income and job opportunities so they can make sure it matches their lifestyle goals and their personality and interests. Three of the students credit the course with redefining their educational goals while others felt the process was beneficial in solidifying their choices.

Participant One appreciated the focus on student's goals as he felt it helped him refocus to a more appropriate major. He had come to college planning to become a nurse, but as he had to answer questions about what to expect from college and what his

goals were, he realized that nursing didn't match who he was, and he needed to find a career that he enjoyed. During the semester he spoke with his professor and discovered that his real passion was cooking, resulting in his changing his goal to transfer to culinary school.

Participant Two recollected that the personality test they took helped her find her major. She said the test was provided to match students' strengths and interests to a career. Her results showed social work as her top career match, and this led her to discover probation officer as her career choice. A project they completed that helped solidify this decision was a scrapbook the students had to create that showed where they saw themselves in ten years. From her perspective, it made the goals realistic and clear as the students had to connect their long-term goals in life to the realities of their selected career. They had to match their desired lifestyle to the average salary of their selected career.

Participant Five recalled taking a personality test and having to write a paper regarding her selected career. The test guided her to physical therapy or other health services careers where she could help other people. Participant Six felt the survey they completed to determine which career would be a good fit for them was beneficial, especially for students straight out of high school. While as a returning student, he had already selected his major, he felt the assignment was worthwhile.

Course Content

The EDUC 1300 – Learning Frameworks course has the following student learning outcomes:

1. Students in the college success course will be able to assess and report on their strengths, preferences, and college and career success attributes.
2. Students in the college success course will be able to identify, describe and utilize campus support services, systems, and student life opportunities.
3. Students in the college success course will be able to use financial literacy knowledge and skills to create a personal money management plan for college success.
4. Students in the college success course will be able to formulate educational and career goals and apply strategies to advance their goals and college performance.
5. Students in the college success course will be able to create an academic plan and identify the requirements for successful completion of their academic plan.
6. Students in the college success course will be able to establish collegial relationships with LSCS faculty, staff, and peers.

During the interviews, the students shared their perceptions of the student success skills they were taught, especially items like notetaking, time management, and other skills students need to be successful in their classes. Additionally, they discussed the ways the class strived to encourage students to engage with the campus community through student organizations and other campus activities.

Student Success Skills

While helping students clarify their academic and career goals is a critical outcome for EDUC 1300, another major focus is providing students the academic and social skills they need to be successful in their college classes. The course includes

lessons on notetaking, time management, and other types of study skills. Six students found these lessons helpful as they progressed through their academic career.

Participant Five was a strong proponent of the course. She felt like the notetaking skills would definitely help students progress and be successful. She described the course as "it was just like a basic . . . Need-to-know class" (05.F10.01272012.34). Participant Two appreciated discovering what kind of learner she was, how to study based upon her learning style, and all of the study skills included in the course. Participant Eight felt that the course helped him learn to pay more attention in all of his classes by taking notes and keeping his files in a folder. The most significant lesson he learned was how to manage his time. He also enjoyed the journaling the class did, feeling that it helped get frustrations off his chest. He said the course helped him learn how to pay more attention in his classes even to the point of realizing he should buy a recorder for his geology class. He believed the time management skills helped students avoid the hurdles and barriers they hit as they try to complete their college degree.

Participant Four felt that the class improved her skills including her listening skills and to not be afraid of asking questions in class. She recalled a journal about what they did on a daily basis and how they prioritized their time. The journal helped her see how she spent her time and what her priorities really were. She felt that students could see the correlation between the amount of time they worked on their classes and their grades. Participant Seven also recalled having to write a journal every week to just talk about what happened in school and how they were studying and a review of the chapters

they read. While the journals were beneficial, he acknowledged that while he recalled taking the learning styles inventory, that information did not stay with him.

Participant Three reflected that an assignment that she hated during the semester ended up being the most beneficial part of the course. They were required to keep all of their homework and submit it at the end of the semester in a binder. “I had to keep up with that because it would just be overwhelming if I didn’t, so I couldn’t procrastinate. So that was probably the best thing to keep on track with that. It wasn’t fun” (03.F10.04032012.54). She said the class helped her learn and study better especially through organizing her materials. Personality quizzes like What Color is Your Parachute were memorable to her. She took the study skills component to heart and started doing her homework every night which helped her keep from falling behind.

Many of the study skills lessons were provided through the textbook, but students also referenced the way the faculty used videos to present the material. Participant Five recalled watching brief videos in class that dealt with how to be successful in life and handle difficult situations that the students then discussed in small groups. These activities made the class very interactive instead of boring.

Not all students felt that this focus on study skills was necessary. Participant Nine felt the class was “just personal learning experiences” (09.M10.12092014.36). Participant Four also commented that the skills were not helpful to her. “I don’t believe that I used any of that material since I walked out of that room” (04.F10.01272012.p.93).

Campus Engagement

Typically students who are engaged in the campus have a greater likelihood of persisting to the next semester and completing their coursework. Unfortunately none of the students stated they were interested in participating in any of the clubs. One of the course outcomes is to encourage students to get involved in student organizations and take advantage of the student support services throughout the campus. Participant Five wanted to attend the club activities fair that the campus had near the beginning of the semester but was doing homework. She said she was still shy and was not sure what clubs existed on campus. Participant Nine said he was not "one of those people" who joined clubs (09.M10.12092014.38). Participant Two commented that they discussed the clubs in her class but she was not interested, especially as an older student. She said the "younger kids . . . should know about that stuff" (02.F10.03212012.78).

Additionally, students did not acknowledge taking advantage of the instructional support services provided on campus after being introduced to them. Participant Two recalled having to do a library search activity and did not like it. Participant Four did end up using the library but not the tutoring center.

Course Interactions

While assignments and learning outcomes are the foundation of a course, the interactions with people within the class can frequently have the greatest impact on the students. The participants shared their perceptions of the interactions with their faculty, their advisors, and their peers. Having faculty who were highly engaged with their students, interacting with advisors who were embedded in their classes to support their

educational goals, and connecting with other students were critical to positive responses to the class.

Faculty

Faculty were critical to the student engagement and student learning that takes place in classes. As EDUC 1300 is taken by students during their first semester in college, the faculty member can have a positive or negative impact on students continuing their educational career. Each participant had a lot to say about their faculty and the impact they had on the class and their learning. Participant One felt that the teacher makes a big difference on how meaningful the class would be to each student.

Nine of the ten participants commented on how engaging and supportive their teachers were. They appreciated that the faculty took time to get to know their names and would get to know each individual. Participant One said that students had to go to his professor's office to meet with her so she could talk to each student individually. Participant Three said her instructor was very involved with the class, sitting with them and getting to know them. Participant Four had some issues with the class as an older student, but she was able to voice her concerns with her instructor who respected the student and tried to improve the situation. For Participant Five, the instructor showed her support by sharing details of her own life, especially her college experience. This made the class more engaging and beneficial to the student. She was able to talk with the instructor about her goals which she found very helpful. Participant Six said her instructor encouraged students that they could overcome any of the challenges they will face in college by either the support resources the college has or by asking questions.

She made the students feel that they could reach their educational goals and that success was possible. “She instilled . . . in us no matter what to just keep, just keep pushing, just keep driving, just keep pushing” (06.M10.01302012.p.53). Participant Ten summed up the support many of these professors showed when he commented that even semesters later he would see his professor in the halls and she would stop and ask how he was doing.

Due to their supportive nature, most of the students really liked their professors. Participant One felt his instructor was “excellent” and a “natural teacher” (01.M10.02092012.97). She really helped him out and was a really nice teacher. She showed the students around campus to make sure they knew where everything was. Participant Two said her instructor was “very down to earth” (02.F10.03212012.70). She really liked her because the professor was sometimes late to class which the student interpreted to mean that the professor had a life that sometimes got in the way just like her students, “but we also have business to take care of” (02.F10.03212012.71). She was easy but would push them to get their work done while respecting their overall work and life conflicts. Participant Three said her instructor was really nice and made the class interesting. She wasn’t too relaxed but just was a good teacher. Participant Four said her professor, in her first semester of teaching, was an “awesome” teacher “who had good intentions for the class” (04.F10.01272012.101). This student was not happy with the class but stated that the instructor was responsible for her sticking with the class the entire semester. “She had a heart of gold and she was just looking out for everybody” (04.F10.01272012.63). Participant Five also described her instructor as “awesome” with

her calm and relaxing personality instead of others who have a do-it-now-mentality (05.F10.01272012.38). The instructor was really helpful by explaining things in different ways than other instructors. As she said, “I loved the teacher” (05.F10.01272012.7). “Awesome” was also the word Participant Ten used to describe his professor while Participant Seven chose “cool” (10.M10.12092014.35; 07.M10.02012013.11). Participant Six described his instructor as someone “who was very meek and mild yet incredibly smart, who passionately wanted to make sure that the students understood what college had to offer” (06.M10.01302012.26). According to him, she was very gentle yet had command of the class.

While the vast majority of the participants really appreciated their faculty, Participant Eight was not as impressed with his instructor. He felt she was an average teacher but was lenient and helped him when he took a little while to get his book. He did state that now that as she became an advisor, he still went to her for advice on his other courses.

While the overall impression of the faculty was very strong, two of the participants who were older students felt that the faculty member sometimes used them as mentors for the other students. One saw this as a positive experience where the other did not. Participant Six said there was an incident in class on a day he was not present where a group of boys were not respectful to a young female in the class. The professor allowed the class to respond to the situation without much interference but was there if needed to take control. The next class the professor brought the topic up again so that the mature student could provide his input into the situation and help teach respect for others

in a way that she would not have been able to on her own. The benefit was that the students were able to manage a potentially awkward situation among themselves. Participant Four felt she was in a more difficult situation. With the instructor teaching her first semester, she wasn't quite prepared for the students. She was engaging and would ask the students what they did over the weekend and then ask about their homework as a friendly, encouraging reminder. She was "caring" and "gave one hundred and ten percent" (04.F10.01272012.60). While she respected her instructor for her work ethic, she felt that "the teacher was using me as a role model for the younger students who were just out of high school" (04.F10.01272012.21).

Intrusive Advisors

An integral component of the course is the inclusion of intrusive advising. Students had to meet with advisors multiple times within each class. Participant One felt that the meeting with the advisor "takes all the stress from your shoulders about what class" to take (01.M10.02092012.36). New students do not know what to do or how to do it and the advisors helped with that. The advisor recently helped guide him to his transfer institution. He had intended on going to a culinary school in New York City, but the cost of tuition and the location had him looking for another option. His advisor recommended a culinary school in Austin. Through these conversations, the advisor helped guide what classes to take at Lone Star College so they would transfer. When asked if he would have met with an advisor on his own if it was not part of his class, he said he would have eventually needed to. He did think having the advisor connected with the class helped because they can guide students early on before they find out on their

own that they need help. Students just want to get in and get out, so they don't stop to make sure they are doing the right thing for their plans. Additionally, he appreciated the speech class the advisor recommended.

Participant Two found the inclusion of the advisor was probably the most beneficial component of the course as students, especially returning students, do not think to go to them. Frequently students are just taking classes, not really knowing what they are doing or what classes to take. As an "older student sometimes you're kind of embarrassed to ask" (02.F10.03212012.27). She now knows talking to an advisor is not a big deal; it's what they are there for. Prior to the class, she did not know that. The advisor helped her plan her schedule and she will now go speak to one as she is preparing to transfer to Sam Houston State University. She encouraged her daughter to speak to an advisor and suggested it be required of all students when they first register. As she changed her major, she knew she needed to speak to her advisor to make sure what the best place is for her and what courses she should take. She did recommend the advisor portion should be early in the semester to help students out at the very beginning.

Participant Three stated how helpful the advisors always are. She has changed majors three times and spoke with them to make sure she knows what she needed to do with the major change. They helped her stay working toward her path, and she felt comfortable to go meet with them when needed. The advisor helped her realize she can look through the catalog to get a better idea of what would interest her for a career.

Participant Four, as an international student, already had to meet with her international advisor. She enjoyed the communication and "them knowing where I'm going with everything" (04.F10.01272012.38). As she was already working with a mandatory advisor, the intrusive advising did not really impact her directly, but she did feel it was important for the other students. "I think advisors are awesome and I think everybody should spend as much time with them as they can because they really do help get your goals done" (04.F10.01272012.42). She commented about all of the classes having just these names and numbers that do not mean anything to a student.

Participant Six discussed how the advisor helped him when he did not get accepted into the physical therapy assistant program. She helped him move forward toward an associates degree and to transfer. The advisor told him to see what life offers as he continued to take the right courses and prepare to apply again. He called her a "beacon of light" who would take the time to speak to him and guide him (06.M10.01302012.37). After he suffered this academic setback, he credited his advisor with keeping him in school because she asked about his overall motivation so he could find the way to continue toward a new goal. He stated how most students just think about advising when it is time to register for classes, but they provide much more guidance. He was in TrIO at the time of the interview with a hands-on advisor who was helping him as he navigated the steps he had to take to reach his goal. Participant Eight liked when the advisor would come because she would do a random gift bag with each visit. He got a free cup one time. He would visit with her to know what classes he needed to take. After he received his required course list, he had not used the advisor

because he planned to take the courses off the list. He did go see the advisor originally about his career plans which got him set on the right path.

While most participants had very positive experiences with their advisors, a couple had mixed experiences. Participant Seven was the grandson of one of the campus advisors, but he had a different advisor for his EDUC 1300 class. He liked meeting with her because she kept the students on track. He felt those meetings allowed him to ask additional questions about his academic goals which he thought was extremely helpful. He enjoyed those meetings and thought she was really good. At the same time, understandably, his grandfather helped him out a lot by answering questions or putting him in contact with the right people. He had situations where the advisors since his first semester had not been as helpful as he would like. He encountered a situation where he felt rushed instead of helped by an advisor. Participant Nine did not recall meeting with an advisor. He only used them when he needed permission to get into a specific class. Participant Ten felt that the advisor was helpful but not really necessary. He did say it was beneficial but did not make a direct connection to his performance in the course or afterward.

Finally, Participant Five felt that the advisor did not help her. The classroom visits were group conversations and she did not feel the advisor had time for one-on-one conversations with her. Whenever she would try to go visit with her advisor, the advisor was always busy. When she did get to meet with her, she was nice but it just was not a long enough conversation. She ended up with TrIO which does provide the type of advising that she found beneficial.

Peers

Students have numerous ways of responding to their peers in classes, especially during their first semester of coursework. Some are nervous and uncomfortable while others are excited to make new friends. Participant One enjoyed the fact he got to meet people on campus and Participant Eight commented about making new friends in the class. Additionally, Participant Ten felt that the other students seemed nice. Participant Six enjoyed the fact that the class put him in contact with other students who were in college for the first time or were an older student like him. On the other side, Participant Five was uncomfortable with the other students. She felt some were a little crazy, so she just sat in the corner during class. She commented numerous times throughout the interview about her shy nature, so the loud nature of the other students made her feel uncomfortable. Participant Three had a somewhat similar reaction, commenting on the "rambunctious" students in the class (03.F10.04032012.62). Participant Four complained about the other students who did not do their homework, especially when they were completing a group project and hadn't done their part.

One of the ways many faculty encourage student engagement in their classes is by including group work for some of their assignments. Participant Five liked the group work because it helped her get to know the other students. She was shy, so this forced engagement helped her feel more confident to ask her classmates if she needed help. Because of her shyness, she did recommend adding some speech activities to the class to help with engagement. Participants Nine and Ten also recalled the numerous group activities but did not present an opinion about them.

The three non-traditional students in the course did have some frustrations with the way the course was developed as they did not feel the course fit their needs. Participant Two discussed the awkwardness of interacting with the younger students. She first felt uncomfortable when they wanted to be her friend, but then, after working with them, she found that she did gain benefits from them. When suggesting creating sections just for returning students, she said it would not be beneficial as all of the other classes were mixed. Participant Six did enjoy the class and enjoyed the role of mentor to the younger students. He did state that "the older students don't have the same challenges that the younger ones do" (06.M10.01302012.67).

Participant Four was much more frustrated. She felt that everything was geared toward younger students. She said it would be beneficial for "those that daddy's paying," but was not necessary for those who had already lived life and learned the basics of a mature adult (04.F10.01272012.48). When asked by the instructor for advice for her for the next semester, the student "told her you need to focus it more on adults that have been in the work field so it's not frustrating for them" (04.F10.01272012.32).

Final Perceptions

After completing the course, students were able to provide some overall perceptions of their experiences. They shared numerous statements regarding the benefits the course provided them and how they felt the course helped them meet their academic goals. Students also discussed the ease of the course, feeling that the class was basically an easy A with no academic rigor. They also shared feedback on whether they felt the course impacted their educational persistence in future semesters. While many of

these comments were supportive, others had negative reactions to the class which they shared. Finally, students made recommendations for future semesters to be considered.

Course Benefits

Eight of the participants found benefits from the student success course. Participant Three appreciated being introduced to the different learning styles of men and women. She said it helped her learn and study better. She was glad she took the course because she felt it helped her more than she originally thought. She believed that the course should be required for all students because they wouldn't take it on their own but the benefit was worth it.

Participant Five also felt that the class provided many benefits for the students. It gave students tips and helped them be comfortable in their surroundings. The class opened up new possibilities for her. She said "the class was awesome. And the teacher was too" (05.F10.01272012.73). She felt the class made you less shy because students were encouraged to "go up to somebody and start a random conversation" (05.F10.01272012.75). She did not have any concerns about whether she got college credit for the course because she liked it that much.

Participant Six felt that the course would be beneficial to all students. He said it "can help catapult them and guide them and actually start to get them set up with some stability as far as college was concerned" (06.M10.01302012.65). He felt the materials would help new students understand the difficulties they might encounter throughout their educational experience and provide needed assistance to persevere. People are there to help students along the way as he experienced. He said that, as an older student

coming to college for the first time, “the class really grounded me, pointed out all of the avenues I needed to be aware of” (06.M10.01302012.57). He was adamant that this course was important for all entering students. He thought it had a tremendous impact on him on a number of different levels.

Participant Seven felt the one beneficial component of the course was thinking about what he wanted to do and setting goals. Participant Eight felt the main benefit was learning about time management and how to take notes. He thought that all students should take it to be focused on their final goal. Participant One told his friends to enroll in the class their first semester because it “takes some stress away” (01.M10.02092012.45). He felt it was not a waste of time and “it’s a good way to start college” (01.M10.02092012.35). Participant Two also felt the class was beneficial because we always get something out of every experience. She felt the chapters from the textbook were most beneficial. She also liked that the class wasn’t too hard “because it got my feet wet but . . . wasn’t too terribly mind-boggling” (02.F10.03212012.13), especially with the other courses. Additionally, Participant Four found the course beneficial for “exploring other ways of dealing with circumstances in life” (04.F10.01272012.55). She thought the interactions of the class were good.

Additionally, three of the students said the course helped them transition and adapt to college. Participant Six said the course made it more comfortable coming to college as it would introduce him to the “college experience and college life” (06.M10.01302012.12). It helped him calm down and answered “a lot of questions that I thought I might have” (06.M10.01302012.4). Participant One said this class helped settle

him into college. He felt it is “a class to teach us how college runs. . . . That was what it was to me” (01.M10.02092012.74). While he did not feel the course was necessary, it did help students get adapted to college. Participant Eight recommends the class to other students to keep them from making mistakes that can lead them to failing.

Easy College Credit

For half of the students, the positive response was due to their perception of how easy the class was. Participant One felt this was an easy class to have completed. It was a “chance to go calm down from my other classes” (01.M10.02092012.25). It relaxed him and was his “free class” as it was mostly participation and helped him get through his first semester (01.M10.02092012.23). He even joked that he wished there was a Frameworks II class to have another easy class in his schedule the second semester. He saw it as “just a class I took just to enjoy college” (01.M10.02092012.30).

Participant Five originally thought the class was supposed to be like English and math, with lots of homework and essay writing. When she learned that it did not have that, she stated that it was an easy class to complete and was not hard to make an A because “it’s common knowledge” (05.F10.01272012.86). Participant Ten felt the class was easy as well. He earned his first A in a long time as his primary goal was just to pass his classes. It was a “good GPA boost” (10.M10.12092014.28). Participant Two also commented that the course was an easy one and Participant Nine recalled watching a lot of movies and that the course was one where he was able to get an A.

Persistence

As the students I interviewed had all passed the class and were still on campus to be able to answer the interview questions, this is a group that had persisted past their first semester. The question to be determined, however, is if the students felt the FYE course played a part in their decision. Overall, they did feel the course helped, but they also said they would have continued regardless of taking the class.

Participant Five said that the course did contribute to his beginning college with all As. His grades began to go down after that, but that strong start helped him continue through the future semesters when things began to get harder. Participant Six also felt the course assisted in his persistence, but he also gave credit to his instructor. Participant Eight saw how the course impacted his immediate success and said that, as he is further in his educational career and has encountered some difficulties, he should go back to see if there are some techniques or study skills he could incorporate to help him be more successful. Participant Seven realized that the course helped prepare students for when their plans change. At the time he did not think that would be an issue, but then he realized that it gets students thinking about what they need to be successful and can really help them through those times when changes occur.

Participant One, who did not feel the course was beneficial, saw that one of its goals was to "encourage you to come back" (01.M10.02092012.71). He said he would have returned the next semester regardless of taking EDUC 1300, but it did make it easier to stay in college. Participant Three said that she would have continued toward her educational goals without the class, but that it did help her for the next semester. She

acknowledges that the content did not necessarily stick with her, and she is now struggling. She sees that as a reflection on her, however, not on the course.

Negative Reactions

While students did see a correlation between taking the course and persisting to the next semester and saw some benefits from the class, students also had some negative responses to the experience. Participant One felt that he did not really learn that much from the class. He thought the course was mostly a waste of time as it did not relate to anything. With the ease of the course, it made him feel college could be doable for him. If given an option, he would have rather have taken a speech or psychology course, something that would be "way harder, but . . . would help me in my career" (01.M10.02092012.70). He also said that a lot of his friends did not like the course. He referenced the "crafts" they did that just seemed to lack any meaning. He did not see the usefulness in the course as it basically just taught how to enjoy college. The most memorable part of the course for Participant One was that they colored in class. His impression was that "if this is how college is this is going to be awesome. But then my bubble got popped. It got harder" (01.M10.02092012.33).

Participant Four also used the phrase that the course was a waste of a whole semester. She said she cared about being there and getting a good grade but that it was frustrating. She "didn't get anything out of the class" (04.F10.01272012.47). As an older student, she felt very frustrated and spoke with the instructor about it. The instructor asked her to "keep my spirits up" because "she needed me to lead my group and guide them in the right direction" (04.F10.01272012.57). Participant Four was also frustrated

with the course because, as an international student, she had to pay international rates for this course. Another word she used to describe her reaction to the course was disappointed. She did not like the creative types of projects. Her perception was that the big poster board projects and collages were a waste of her time. She also called the textbook "childish" (04.F10.01272012.85). She said she was "much more mature than the assignments in that class" (04.F10.0127201.26). She recalled completing a career exploration paper but felt that it was a waste of time when she already knew her career goals.

Participant Nine did not like the course and that they did not do much in the class. He called it "a waste of my time and money" (09.M10.12092014.11). He remembered "I was a college student and I colored. I was like, I mean it was funny but at the same time you're in college. You're not supposed to color" (09.M10.12092014.12). While they did have to learn about how to study and how students learn, he did not believe he gained anything from it that benefited him. While Participant One also recalled coloring but saw it as a way it made the class easy, Participant Nine felt that coloring was not something he thought he would be doing in college.

Participant Seven said the class was not what he anticipated it to be and that it was not necessary. He did not feel the course helped him in any way. He remembered having a lesson about peer pressure and, as the topic had already been covered in high school, it should not be part of a college course. He commented that the course did not help him meet people or improve his study habits. Participant Five called the class easy, recalling class ending early after students completed a campus scavenger hunt.

Additionally, Participant Six described the class as mostly busywork. While Participant Ten believed the course was beneficial, he said that since he was still struggling to get out of developmental courses, he was not sure how helpful it was overall.

Recommendations

The students made recommendations to improve the class for the next students. These recommendations include suggestions such as activities that would provide more real-life learning experiences.

Participant Two suggested finding a way to do some real career exploration like the ride-along that criminal justice students can take. Instead of just an introduction to learning, it would be an introduction to the career to discover if this is what a student really wants to do. It could be a weeklong shadow of a person in the chosen career. Her own daughter went through a similar experience at Texas A&M University where she thought she wanted to be a veterinarian. After the experience, she changed her mind and changed her major to nursing. This would help avoid those situations where students complete a degree and go out into that job just to discover they did not like it. Another unique recommendation came from Participant Eight who suggested bringing in guest speakers and videos from former students who are now employed and can speak about how the course helped them be successful in their future careers.

Participant Four suggested creating sections specifically for different students. She suggested sections for students “fresh out of high school” and others for those students who “have established themselves and they know where they are going in their life, and why already they have goals that they have reached and they know how to do

that" (04.F10.01272012.78). In contrast, Participant Six suggested that the course should not be segregated by age or life experience. He said the "melting pot" created an opportunity for everyone to contribute something different to the class. It made it better than if all of the students were returning students like him.

Participant Four also suggested that the class should be offered in a shorter session instead of the full semester. She recommended an eight, five, or preferably three week course. "A full semester makes you just shake your head" (04.F10.01272012.70). She additionally recommended that the course deal with more than just school issues like study skills. It should support your daily life and be job-related. She saw it as a way to balance school, life, and work through time management and goal setting.

At the time the study took place, EDUC 1300 was not required for all students. Participant Two said she thought making the course required would not hurt because everybody "would get to talk to an advisor" (02.F10.03212012.60), but she was not sure it should be required for everybody. Participant Three said that it would need to be required because students straight out of high school would not take it if it was not.

Participant Seven did not feel the class was beneficial to him because it was not college oriented in a way that would help him be successful in college. Even with this opinion of the impact for himself, he stated that the class was "absolutely necessary to have to take" (07.M10.02012013.59). He thought it could be a good option for a student who had struggled in his classes to take to potentially help the student be successful in the future.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to provide students' perception of the impact an FYE course can have on their persistence in college. Through the interviews of these ten diverse students at Lone Star College, we can gather some insights into what works and what does not work for them. Overall, students found three consistent benefits to the course: academic support, engaged faculty, and intrusive advising, as visualized in Figure 1. Academic support exists from through the study skills presented throughout the course, the instruction on learning styles, the focus on the career exploration and goal-setting, and the instructional support such as tutoring. Engaging faculty was a significant factor in how students perceived the benefits of the course. Most felt their faculty cared about them and encouraged them to continue toward their educational goals. In addition to the role faculty played, the advisors were just as critical. The intrusive advising mandated in the course helped students know where they needed to go next during their educational journey. Through the multi-layered supports provided throughout the semester, students perceived a primarily positive outcome to this FYE course.

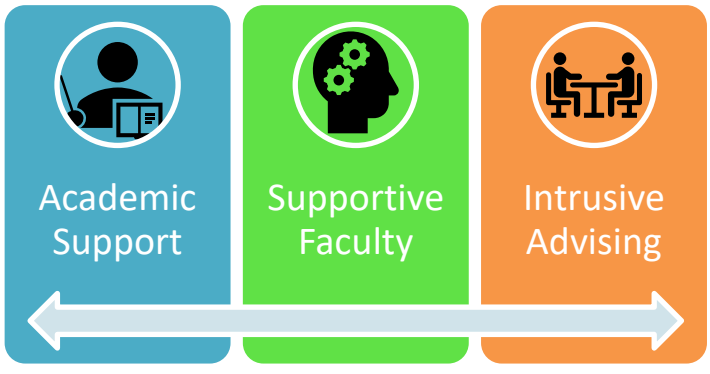

Figure 1. Student-perceived benefits of the first-year experience course.

For the group interviewed, the areas that had the most negative impact was that the course was not perceived to be meaningful for all students and some of the curriculum appeared childish instead of appropriate for adult students. While almost all students had something negative to say about the course, the most consistent and troublesome were that some students felt the material did not support their needs or that it was not appropriate for adult learners. Faculty need to find the balance of making the material engaging and fun without it becoming childish.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Whether we are prepared or not, students are coming to the community colleges at increasing numbers. While we frequently discuss the need to prepare students so that they are college-ready, conversations are now changing so that colleges are student-ready (McNair, T.A., et. al., 2016). We cannot assume that students know what they need and have the skills necessary to be successful when they walk through our doors. One of the ways community colleges prepare students for the demands of college is our First-Year Experience courses. This study attempts to answer the question of whether such programs are beneficial in helping students persist through their program and earn their certificate or degree.

Implications for the Work

The findings presented here can have wide-reaching implications for those involved in community colleges and working to help more students reach their academic goals. Below are some of the ways this research can support students and help faculty, administrators, and policy makers as they evaluate whether to make changes to the FYE courses, keep them as is, or remove them as a requirement.

Students

The findings show that while not all students felt the course was worthwhile, there were some clear benefits to the class. When students had a clear understanding of the goals of the course and how it can help students reach their educational goals, they

had a more positive response to the materials. When students enter the class already understanding the expectations and goals, students will be better prepared to make the connection of what they are learning in the course to their overall educational plans. Additionally, with the understanding of the benefits that intrusive advising and campus engagement can have, students can take advantage of these experiences and become more involved in and engaged on campus.

Based upon the students' perceptions, one of the best ways to make the course as beneficial as possible for students to enter the class with an open mind and a willingness to learn. The students who are interested in learning what they can do to be better students and get confirmation that their selected major is the right one gained the most from the class. Those students who walk into the class with the perception that it is a waste of time and money typically maintain that view throughout the entire course.

Faculty

Faculty can gain quite a bit from this study. Seeing how students perceive what happens in class, faculty can make changes that will result in a better, more effective class. The most common complaint from students was the childish nature of the class. Faculty need to remember that the students are adults. While a large number may be seventeen or eighteen years old, every faculty member will have at least one person who is over thirty years old and has already experienced many life events. The goal of the course is to prepare students to be successful college students, so much of the curriculum is focused on new students. The faculty just need to be reminded to treat the students as adults and create assignments that work for older adults. While incorporating creativity

and a little bit of play in a course can engage students, faculty need to be mindful that some activities such as coloring may undercut the academic learning experience.

Another implication for faculty is the reminder that engaging faculty have the greatest positive impact on students. Faculty need to be focused on getting to know their students, encourage them to get involved in campus activities, know the events that are occurring on campus, and basically be a supportive resource for all of their students. Students remember the faculty who take the time to chat with them before or after class and get to know a little about their personal lives. When faculty get to know the students as individuals instead of just another body in the class, their students perform better. Making the effort to mold the whole student is worth the time and effort for the student.

Finally, in contrast to the conversation about the importance of academic rigor in most college courses, many students felt a huge benefit of this FYE course was the ease of the class. Maintaining a quality course with learning outcomes and assignments that allow students to be successful college students is critical. At the same time, students benefit from the low stress the course can provide. By not requiring excessive out-of-class activities, students can gain the benefits of the learning experience while maintaining their focus on their core curriculum courses.

Administrators

There are a few takeaways for administrators from this study. Administrators need to be just as mindful as the faculty of the potential childishness of the class. When the curriculum leads are selecting textbooks, they need to make sure the book speaks to all students, not just the eighteen-year-olds. The content of the text needs to match the

instructional goals but should work for recent high school graduates as well as for those who have families of their own, have been in the military, or have been out in the workplace before going to college. The curriculum also needs to be reviewed so it focuses on the activities and learning experiences that have the greatest impact on students.

Administrators also need to do a better job of explaining the goals of the class to the students so they can prepare for what to expect in the class and understand the benefits the course has. As the evidence shows, students gain a greater appreciation of the course when they fully understand the benefits they can gain rather than assuming the class is a waste of time. To accomplish this, administrators need to make sure they are effectively marketing the course appropriately for students.

Probably the most critical implication for administrators is confirming the importance of faculty to the success of our students. The administrators need to make sure they are hiring the right faculty to teach these FYE courses. The faculty need to show an interest and knowledge in what makes students successful in college, but, probably more important, the faculty need to show an interest in the whole student. They need to be the type of people who will get to know their students and the college and connect students to the appropriate campus resources. They need to show compassion and support when students encounter difficulties. Hiring the right faculty is one of the most critical steps administrators can do to make sure an FYE course provides the educational support needed for students to reach their goals.

After hiring quality faculty, administrators need to provide the necessary funding and verbal support for high-quality professional development to those faculty. The focus should be on how to encourage the faculty to be engaged in the campus and how to learn what is happening that would be beneficial to their students. The professional development should also prepare faculty to be engaging by flipping the classroom, creating interactive learning experiences, and learning ways to get to know their students.

Policy Makers

This study, along with others, support the conclusion that an FYE course is beneficial to help students navigate their higher education experience. With this research evidence, Texas state policy makers need to acknowledge the benefits of the course and create a state mandate to include EDUC 1300 in the core curriculum, similar to the mandate of communication, history, and the other 42 hours currently in the core curriculum for all community colleges in Texas. By adding the course to the core, all community college students would gain the benefits from the course, and it will encourage the four-year universities to accept it as part of the required courses in their degree. Currently, each college in Texas is able to decide if they want to offer EDUC 1300 and how it will fit in the students' degree plans. Additionally, even though the course is a transferable one, most four-year universities only accept the course as elective credits, so students have to risk going over the 150 credit-hour limit of a bachelor's degree.

Other states, if they have not already done so, need to make similar changes as needed based upon their policies and procedures. The need for educated adults is clear as we continue into the 21st century. By providing an FYE course, we can support all of our adult learners as they navigate their educational career, either towards an associates degree, a bachelors, or a workforce certificate. This course can help them clarify their goals and acquire the skills needed to complete their certificate or degree and become a contributing member of our national economy.

Place in the Literature

The results of this study are consistent with the findings of O'Gara, Karp, and Hughes (2009). Their study found that the main benefits of a first-year experience course included learning more about the college, improving their study skills, and developing significant relationships. This study found similar results in that the students perceived the greatest benefits were from the relationships they built with their instructor, advisor, and classmates and the college overall along with the gained study skills necessary to be successful in their coursework.

Another finding from this study is that the benefits of the course was dependent upon the individual experiences of the students as they entered the class. Duggan and Williams (2011) said the course was not beneficial for all students as the curriculum needed to be individualized for each student. The students in this study who were critical of the course felt that the materials were not necessary or repeated information they already knew. In contrast to Duggan and Williams' research which found that the course had the greatest benefit for non-traditional students, the majority of the non-traditional

students in this study felt there was not much benefit in the course to them as compared to the traditional students. They consistently commented on the childish nature of some of the assignments and class activities.

More recently, Kimbark et al (2017) studied student persistence as related to a student success course also in Texas. They found a positive relationship between enrollment in a student success course and persistence, retention, and academic achievement. This study supports Kimbark's research in that it shows that the majority of students perceived that the student success course had a positive impact on their persistence through college. While not all students felt it was necessary or beneficial, it provided a foundation that helped most students during their first semester of college.

Recommendations for Future Studies

As with all research studies, decisions were made to provide a narrow, specific focus. Numerous questions exist that still need to be answered. While this study does add to the scholarship on FYE courses in the community colleges, it also suggests the need for future studies at Lone Star College and nationally.

Lone Star College

An interesting result in this study is comparing the later participants to the earlier participants. As the interviews with some of the students occurred a couple of years after taking the course, many of those students were still enrolled at Lone Star College. That suggests the students had struggled in either completing their degree or transferring. I believe this resulted in fewer details about the course during the interview and a greater perception that the course did not help. It would be worthwhile to do a comparison study

of those students who complete their associates or transfer within three years versus those who are still enrolled at the community college after three years and how they perceive the student success course as part of their current status. While it is disappointing that so many students are still enrolled in community colleges many years after starting, these students do exhibit persistence, unlike those students who leave prior to earning a credential.

Additionally, to get a fuller picture, we need to interview the students who were not successful in the course. As we learn more about a Fixed versus a Growth Mindset, is there something we can do in the classes to help those students who have not been successful in the student success course (Dweck, 2006)? Are there any changes that we can make with the course that would have helped them be successful and persist?

Finally, since this study was completed, the EDUC 1300 at Lone Star College is now required of all first-time-in-college students. Has that changed the outcomes? Previously those mandated to take the course were placed in two developmental courses (reading, writing, or math). The idea was these students were at risk of not being successful due to their lack of college-readiness in English and math. Would there be a different result today now that all students must take the course, regardless of their academic college-readiness?

Nationally

This study provides the perceptions of students at one of the campuses at Lone Star College, a very large, multi-campus community college in the north-Houston area of Texas. In Fall 2019, the demographics of Lone Star College show that the population

is 60% female, 75% under the age of 25, 30% full-time, 85% academic transfer, and 43% Hispanic, 30% White, 14% Black, 8% Asian, and 5% Other (Lone Star College, 2019). Each of these details create a different student body than other community colleges throughout the United States. Based upon this demographic information, new studies on student perceptions of an FYE course should be carried out at other community colleges throughout the nation.

This study was completed in a suburban area outside of a large metropolitan area. Would there be different results in a large urban area? In a rural area? In a large suburban area in another state or another part of the country? Would the results be different at a small institution? As we gather more data based upon the location of the community college, we will have a more complete understanding of the role of an FYE in supporting students regardless of where they live.

Additionally, the focus of the community college could result in different perspectives of the course. Lone Star College is primarily a transfer institution. The vast majority of students are working toward transferring to a four-year university or earning an associate degree. There are some other community colleges that focus mostly on workforce certificates. What impact would this different focus have on an FYE course? As workforce students typically stay on their paths and complete at a higher rate, do they need to career exploration and study skills that are typically components of an FYE course? Would there be different findings at a community college with 50% or more workforce programs?

As the student population can result in different perceptions, how would the results of a similar study at other large institution like Miami Dade College, with a 71% Hispanic student body for their 170,000 students as compared to Northern Virginia Community College with a population of 50% White students with 76,000 students differ from those found in this study (Highlights and Facts, 2019; Quick Facts, 2019)? A similar study at these two institutions would help determine whether race and ethnicity were critical factors in how an FYE is perceived by the students.

With additional studies on student perceptions of an FYE course based upon different factors like the location of the institution, the size of the student body, the academic focus of the institution, and the demographics of the students would give us a more complete understanding of whether students have a positive or negative perception of an FYE course. These results would help institutions and policy makers make more data-based decisions regarding whether an FYE course should be implemented or continued at community colleges throughout the nation.

Final Statements

Lone Star College made the decision that since this is a foundational course for incoming students, the curriculum would be consistent for all courses, which is not typical for other courses at a community college. This curriculum includes a career exploration to help students focus on a final goal, study skills to be successful in college, an understanding of the support services available throughout the college, and other items to help students succeed in class and in their future careers. As the course continues to be reviewed and our students come in with different needs and goals, we

must continuously review the content of the student success course and determine whether the cost and time the class has for students is worth the benefits students will receive. At this point, based upon this study, we need to continue to review the curriculum and instructional activities, but the course should be mandated for all. Administrators and lead faculty need to continuously review how students are doing in the class, how they feel about the impact it has on them throughout their educational career, and what the latest research shows. If our goal is to prepare students to meet their educational goals in a timely manner, then we must continuously review the place an FYE course should have in that journey.

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APPENDIX A

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY IRB APPROVAL

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

Research Compliance and Biosafety

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

DATE: June 12, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO: Yvonna Lincoln
TAMU - College Of Education - Educational Adm & Human Resource Develop

FROM: Dr. James Fluckey
Chair
Institutional Review Board

SUBJECT: Expedited Approval

Study Number: IRB2011-0575D

Title: A First-Year Experience Course in the Community College: A Case Study Analysis of Student Perceptions

Approval Date: 09/09/2011

Continuing Review Due: 05/01/2015

Expiration Date: 06/01/2015

Documents Reviewed and Approved:

Title
Consent Form_Sanchez 2013

Document of Consent:
Waiver of Consent:

Provisions:

Comments: Enrollment of new subjects in progress. 7 of 10 enrolled.

This research project has been approved. As principal investigator, you assume the following responsibilities:

1. **Continuing Review:** The protocol must be renewed by the expiration date in order to continue with the research project. A Continuing Review application along with required documents must be submitted by the continuing review deadline. Failure to do so may result in processing delays, study termination, and/or loss of funding.
2. **Completion Report:** Upon completion of the research project (including data analysis and final written papers), a Completion Report must be submitted to the IRB.
3. **Unanticipated Problems and Adverse Events:** Unanticipated problems and adverse events must be reported to the IRB immediately.
4. **Reports of Potential Non-compliance:** Potential non-compliance, including deviations from protocol and violations, must be reported to the IRB office immediately.
5. **Amendments:** Changes to the protocol must be requested by submitting an Amendment to the IRB for

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http://rcb.tamu.edu

review. The Amendment must be approved by the IRB before being implemented.

6. **Consent Forms:** When using a consent form or information sheet, you must use the IRB stamped approved version. Please log into iRIS to download your stamped approved version of the consenting instruments. If you are unable to locate the stamped version in iRIS, please contact the office.
7. **Audit:** Your protocol may be subject to audit by the Human Subjects Post Approval Monitor. During the life of the study please review and document study progress using the PI self-assessment found on the RCB website as a method of preparation for the potential audit. Investigators are responsible for maintaining complete and accurate study records and making them available for inspection. Investigators are encouraged to request a pre-initiation site visit with the Post Approval Monitor. These visits are designed to help ensure that all necessary documents are approved and in order prior to initiating the study and to help investigators maintain compliance.
8. **Recruitment**: All approved recruitment materials will be stamped electronically by the HSPP staff and available for download from iRIS. These IRB-stamped approved documents from iRIS must be used for recruitment. For materials that are distributed to potential participants electronically and for which you can only feasibly use the approved text rather than the stamped document, the study's IRB Protocol number, approval date, and expiration dates must be included in the following format: TAMU IRB#20XX-XXXX Approved: XX/XX/XXXX Expiration Date: XX/XX/XXXX.
9. **FERPA and PPRA:** Investigators conducting research with students must have appropriate approvals from the FERPA administrator at the institution where the research will be conducted in accordance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) protects the rights of parents in students ensuring that written parental consent is required for participation in surveys, analysis, or evaluation that ask questions falling into categories of protected information.
10. **Food:** Any use of food in the conduct of human subjects research must follow Texas A&M University Standard Administrative Procedure 24.01.01.M4.02.
11. **Payments:** Any use of payments to human subjects must follow Texas A&M University Standard Administrative Procedure 21.01.99.M0.03.

This electronic document provides notification of the review results by the Institutional Review Board.

APPENDIX B

LONE STAR COLLEGE IRB APPROVAL

LONE STAR COLLEGE SYSTEM

November 17, 2011

Dear Ms. Katherine Sanchez:

IRB Application 2011095

The research project "*A First-Year Experience Course in the Community College: A Case Study Analysis of Student Perceptions*" has been reviewed by the Lone Star College Institutional Review Board.

Status: Approved/Exempt: CFR 46.101(b)(1)
Reviewers: Jones/Shmaefsky

Research may begin on this study; approval is valid for 12 months after the start date. If the study extends beyond this period it will be subject to continuing review and will require the submission of a supplemental application at that time.

Please note that any changes to the protocol or procedures for this project after the initial review must be submitted promptly to the IRB for review. In addition, any adverse events should be reported to the IRB Office as soon as possible.

This letter constitutes the official written response of the LSC-Institutional Review Board.

Thank you,

Debra Blackburn

Debra Blackburn
Administrator, Institutional Review Board
Office: 832-813-6588
IRB@LoneStar.edu

5000 Research Forest Drive
The Woodlands, TX 77381-4356
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APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

Version: 09/10/2012

CONSENT FORM
A First-Year Experience Course in the Community College:
A Case Study Analysis of Student Perceptions

Introduction
The purpose of this form is to provide you (as a prospective research study participant) information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research.

You have been asked to participate in a research study regarding your experience in EDUC 1300 at Lone Star College-Tomball and -University Park. The purpose of this study is to determine your perceptions of the course content and intrusive advising within the course and what impact your participation in the course had on your persistence in higher education. You were selected to be a possible participant because you successfully completed EDUC 1300 at Lone Star College-Tomball and -University Park in Fall 2009 or Fall 2010.

What will I be asked to do?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to be interviewed. This study will take 60-90 minutes on one day.

Unless you do not consent, your interview will be digitally recorded.

What are the risks involved in this study?
The risks associated with this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life.

What are the possible benefits of this study?
You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, the results could help community colleges, including Lone Star College-Tomball and -University Park, understand how courses such as EDUC 1300 can help students prepare for college. Additionally the results can lead to necessary changes in the course to make it more beneficial to students.

Do I have to participate?
No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University or Lone Star College System being affected.

Who will know about my participation in this research study?
This study is confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Dr. Fred Bonner, Professor at Texas A&M University, will have access to the records.

If you choose to participate in this study, you may be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and only Dr. Fred Bonner will have access to the recordings. Any recordings will be kept for 3 years and then erased.

Texas A&M University IRB Approval	From: 09/17/12 To: 09/15/13
IRB Protocol # 2011-0575	Authorized by: KR

Version: 09/10/2012

Whom do I contact with questions about the research?
If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Kathy Sanchez, (281) 351-3347, kathy.sanchez@lonestar.edu; Dr. Fred Bonner, (732) 932-7496, ext. 8350, fred.bonner@gse.rutgers.edu.

Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?
This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979) 458-4067or irb@tamu.edu.

Signature
Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participate in this study. I am 18 years of age or older and I agree to participate.

Signature of Participant: _____ **Date:** _____

Printed Name: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____ **Date:** _____

Printed Name: _____

For more information, contact

Kathy Sanchez
(281) 351-3347
kathy.sanchez@lonestar.edu

Dr. Fred Bonner
(732) 932-4796, ext. 8350
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Texas A&M University IRB Approval	From: 09/17/12 To: 09/15/13
IRB Protocol # 2011-0575	Authorized by: KR

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me a little bit about the goals you had when you first came to college.

2. What was your first reaction when you were told you had to register for EDUC 1300, Learning Frameworks?

3. How did you feel about the course when you completed it?

4. What would you consider as the most beneficial components of the course? Why?

5. What would you consider as the least beneficial components? Why?

6. The course requires multiple visits with an advisor who is connected with the class. What did you think about that portion of the course?

7. Would the course have had the same effect on you if you did not have the requirements to visit with the advisor and complete your degree plan? Explain.

8. Did you continue in higher education the semester after you completed EDUC 1300? If so, how did that semester go**?**

9. (If persisted) Do you feel that the EDUC 1300 course had an impact on you continuing in higher education? If so, how?

10. (If not) Is there anything that could have been included in EDUC 1300 that would have helped you continue toward reaching your educational goal?

11. What are your current goals now for higher education?

12. Do you feel that this course in any way impacted your current goals and your ability to reach those goals? Explain.

13. Any final thoughts you would like to share about your experience in EDUC 1300?

APPENDIX E

EDUC 1300 SYLLABUS

EDUC 1300: Learning Framework – First-Year Experience

Course Information	Faculty Information
Course Title: Learning Framework 1st Year Experience	**Name: Michael Donnelly**
Course Number: EDUC 1300	**Office Location: NRB 209H**
Course Section: 6003 & 6005	**Office Phone: 281-290-3656**
Credit Hours: 3 credits: 3 hrs. lecture	**Office Hours:** TTH 8:15-9:00AM 9:30-10:45AM Wed. by appointment
Prerequisite: None	**E-mail: Michael.Donnelly@lonestar.edu**
Semester: Spring 2020	**Class Location: online**
Class Days and Times: Online	**Supervisor Name and Contact:** Dean: Dr. Lawrence Brandyburg (Lawrence.D.Brandyburg@lonestar.edu) 832-813-6897

COURSE MATERIALS (Required):

Understanding Your LSC Experience, 2019-20. (2019). Bedford/St. Martin's.
ISBN: 978-1-319-27558-7
Based on Gardner, J. N., Barefoot, B. O., and Farakish, N. (2017). *Understanding Your College Experience: Strategies for Success.*

COURSE GOAL:

The goal of this class is to transform students' academic behaviors and create a learning environment to integrate students into a collegiate environment, ensure college readiness, enhance overall performance in college courses, and facilitate successful completion of a degree or certificate.

COURSE OVERVIEW:

This course serves as the Lone Star College first-year experience student success course. It is designed to provide first-year students with an opportunity to attain maximum success in college and in life. It will assist students in realizing their full potential by facilitating activities that promote effective learning and personal and professional growth. This course aims to achieve this goal by helping new students connect with LSC resources and promote a positive and successful college experience that leads to completion. At LSC, our data reveals that this course has been successful in increasing student success.

CATALOG COURSE DESCRIPTION:

A study of the research and theory in the psychology of learning, cognition, and motivation; factors that impact learning, and application of learning strategies. Theoretical models of strategic learning, cognition, and

motivation serve as the conceptual basis for the introduction of college-level student academic strategies. Students use assessment instruments (e.g., learning inventories) to help them identify their own strengths and weaknesses as strategic learners. Students are ultimately expected to integrate and apply the learning skills discussed across their own academic programs and become effective and efficient learners. Students developing these skills should be able to continually draw from the theoretical models they have learned.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

1. Students in the college success course will be able to identify, describe, and utilize campus **support** services, systems, and student life opportunities.
2. Students in the college success course will be able to use **financial literacy** knowledge and skills to create a personal money management plan for college success.
3. Students in the college success course will be able to establish collegial **relationships** with LSC faculty, staff, and peers.
4. Students in the college success course will be able to assess and report on their **strengths, preferences**, and college and career success **attributes**.
5. Students in the college success course will be able to formulate educational and career **goals** and apply strategies to advance their goals and college performance.
6. Students in the college success course will be able to create an academic plan and identify the requirements for successful completion of their **academic plan**.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Students will:

1. Identify, discuss, and evaluate learning and study strategies as they apply to the academic environment.
2. Examine personal goals and career plans, utilize college resources including all components of the student portal and learning management system (D2L), and apply strategies for academic success.
3. Identify types of financial aid and criteria to receive and maintain funding.
4. Exhibit written and verbal communication skills individually and in groups.
5. Assess ideas, principles, and patterns related to personal life situations.
6. Design a strategy for success.

COURSE THEMES & TOPICS:

The student success course requires that students be introduced to the following themes. The themes are designed to build upon each other to support students in meeting the learning outcomes of this course.

Making Connections with LSC

- LSC Portal and Learning Management System Instruction (SLO1)
- Campus Resources, Supports, and Services (SLO1, SLO3, SLO6)
- Paying for Your Education (SLO2, Financial Literacy)
- Attributes of a Successful Student (SLO4)
- Goal Setting (SLO3, SLO4, SLO5, Academic Advising Core)

Personal and Professional Growth

- College Readiness (SLO4, Smarter Measure)
- Barriers and Paths to Success (SLO1, SLO3, SLO4)
- Learning Styles/Preferences and Learning Strategies (SLO4)
- Personality Styles/Preferences (SLO4)
- Career Interest Inventories (SLO4, DWYA)

- Career Exploration (SLO4, SLO5, SLO6)
- Establishing Career Goals, Educational Majors, Programs of Study, and Academic Plans (SLO3, SLO4, SLO5, SLO6, Academic Advising Core)
- Planning for Your Financial Future (SLO2, Financial Literacy)

Effective Learning

- Time-Management (SLO4, SLO5, Weekly Schedule)
- Research (SLO4, SLO5)
- Note-Taking (SLO4, SLO5)
- Critical Thinking (SLO4, SLO5)
- Active Reading (SLO4, SLO5)
- Test –Taking (SLO4, SLO5)
- Studying, Organization, and Memorization (SLO4, SLO5)
- Effective Communication, Relationships, and Presentation Skills (SLO3, SLO4, SLO5)

GRADING POLICY:

Grading Point Scale

A = 900-1000
B = 800-899
C = 700-799
D = 600-699
F = below 600

COURSE PROJECTS:

Theme	Assignment	Checklist Item	Points
Making Connections	Campus Resources, Services, and Supports Investigation Assignment	10CAMP	100
	Academic Advising Session:	10GOAL	100
	○ Registration Form (25 Points)		
	○ 1 individual (50 points) – to Complete 10GOAL, 10PLAN, 10REG on Advising Core Requirements Checklist	10PLAN	
	○ Next Term Registration (25 points)	10REGI	
Personal & Professional Growth	College Readiness Assessment – Smarter Measure/Do What You Are Assessment (DWYA)	10CRAS	100
	Path to Success Analysis		100
	Financial Literacy	10FINL	100
	Career Exploration Research Project	10EXPL	100
Effective Learning	Online Discussions (7 @ 15 pts. ea.)		105
	Reflections (5 @ 20 pts. ea.)		100
	Project Management		50
	Syllabus Quiz		15
	Civic Involvement		50
	SMART Goals		20
	Learning Style Inventory		15

	Course Evaluation		10
	Final Project		100
	Total		1000

Late Assignments

10% of the point value will be deducted per calendar day for assignments turned in late. For example, if an assignment is worth 100 points and is turned in one day late, 10 points (10%) will be deducted. An assignment worth 50 points will lose 5 points per calendar day. There are no late submissions allowed for discussions. Discussions are open for a week and close without re-opening. Please see the calendar for dates.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Attendance to all classes is critical. A student who anticipates an absence should notify the instructor in advance. In case of an absence, it is the student's responsibility to obtain lecture notes and assignments.

Tardies are disruptive to the instructional experience; therefore, 3 tardies will equal an absence. Tardies are defined as coming late or leaving early. If a student misses an extensive portion of the class [determined by instructor], he/she will receive an absence for that class period.

Absences from class will directly impact the attendance points earned in this course. Points deducted for absences and tardies are determined by course and class length. Participation/attendance points are earned based on 100 points divided by the number of class meetings for face-to-face classes. Hybrid classes may divide 100 points by the number of face-to-face class meetings and weekly online participation expectations. For online sessions, 100 points will be divided by the number of weeks the class is in session.

The decision to withdraw a student for non-attendance will be at the discretion of the faculty. An instructor may withdraw a student for non-attendance if a student misses six (6) or more hours of class participation.

WITHDRAWAL POLICY:

Lone Star College believes that EDUC 1300 is essential for students to be successful in college. Attendance and participation are necessary for students to benefit fully from the instructional experiences. For this reason, withdrawals by a student from EDUC 1300 are not allowed unless a student is completely withdrawing from the institution. Students with exceptional circumstances and proper documentation can be withdrawn from the course by a campus Vice-President or designee.

Students who have not completed an assignment from the first day of the term to the official day of record will be dropped per campus policy.

For online and hybrid:

The decision to withdraw a student for non-attendance will be at the discretion of the faculty. An instructor may withdraw a student for non-attendance if a student has not logged in and participated in the course after 7 days.

A faculty-initiated withdrawal of a student for non-attendance will be at the discretion of the faculty, must have instructional lead or dean approval, and be done in accordance with the attendance section in their syllabus (see attendance policy above). This action is in accordance with the Academic Catalog, both for Class Attendance and Course Withdrawal Policy. The faculty member must communicate via email to any students notifying them of their withdrawal from the course.

6 – DROP STATEMENT:
Students who enrolled in Texas public institutions of higher education as first-time college students during the Fall 2007 term or later are subject to section 51.907 of the Texas Education Code, which states that an institution of higher education may not permit a student to drop (withdraw with a grade of "W") from more than six courses. This six-course limit includes courses that a transfer student has previously dropped at other Texas public institutions of higher education if they fall under the law.

CLASS PARTICIPATION:
The college classroom is a place for individuals to come together with the common purpose of improving their intellectual and academic skills. All students deserve a classroom environment that is free of interruptions or distractions that impede learning. Because active participation in class discussions is essential, it is important that all students be fully prepared for class each day. The Lone Star College Catalog [Student Conduct, Section 562.01d] states, "Disruptive activity that hinders other students' learning or deters an instructor from effective teaching will not be tolerated under any circumstances."

CODE FOR ACADEMIC HONESTY:
Lone Star College upholds the core values of learning: honesty, respect, fairness, and accountability. LSC promotes the importance of personal and academic honesty. LSC embraces the belief that all learners - students, faculty, staff and administrators - will act with integrity and honesty and must produce their own work and give appropriate credit to the work of others. Fabrication of sources, cheating, or unauthorized collaboration is not permitted on any work submitted within the system.

The consequences for academic dishonesty are determined by the professor, or the professor and academic dean, or the professor and chief student services officer and can include but are not limited to:

1. Having additional class requirements imposed,
2. Receiving a grade of zero or "F" for an exam or assignment,
3. Receiving a grade of "F" for the course,
4. Being withdrawn from the course or program,
5. Being expelled from the college system.

Professors should clearly document how the student's actions violated the academic integrity policy, how a grade was calculated, and the actions taken.

In general, plagiarism means passing off other's ideas as your own or writings of another without giving proper credit by documenting sources. This includes submitting a paper, report or project that someone else has prepared, in whole or in part. It also includes inappropriately collaborating on assignments or tests designed to be completed independently. Please see "Academic Integrity and Student Success" in the LSC Student Handbook at http://www.lonestar.edu/departments/advising/LSCS_Student_Handbook_Web.pdf.

ADA STATEMENT (2017)
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. If you have a disability that requires accommodation(s) to participate in this course, please contact the LSC-University Park Disability Services Office as soon as possible (UP

12.231H 281-401-5366). Disability Services will provide you with the documentation I need to provide your accommodation(s). Failure to handle this in a timely manner may delay your accommodations.

CAMPUS CARRY STATEMENT

The Texas Legislature enacted campus carry by passing Senate Bill 11, effective at LSC on August 1, 2017. Senate Bill 11, known as the "Campus Carry" law, amends Texas law to allow license holders to carry concealed handguns on college campuses. To carry a concealed handgun on LSC campuses, an individual must have a valid License to Carry issued by the Texas Department of Public Safety.

LSC has established rules and regulations regarding enforcement of Campus Carry. Lone Star College prohibits concealed carry in some areas of LSC campuses. For additional information about Campus Carry, visit the LSC Campus Carry website at http://www.lonestar.edu/campuscarry.

EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION INFORMATION

Lone Star College System (LSCS) is committed to maintaining the safety of the students, faculty, staff, and guests while visiting any of our campuses. See http://www.lonestar.edu/oem for details. In the event of an emergency, contact LSCS Police at (281) 290-5911 or X5911.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT:

Check the Catalog for the statement concerning the equal opportunity principle.

GUARANTEED GRADUATE POLICY:

Check the LSC System Board Policy concerning guarantees for graduates.

SOFTWARE PIRACY:

Law strictly prohibits unauthorized copying of software purchased by LSCS for use in laboratories. Administration will take appropriate disciplinary action against anyone violating copyright laws.

Lone Star College-University Park Learning Center is committed to your success!

Your success is our primary concern! If you are experiencing challenges achieving your academic goals, please contact your instructor or an advisor. We can provide assistance with academic needs, ADA accommodations, classroom difficulties, financial concerns, and other issues.

Tutoring: For all disciplines, please call 281.401.5388 for information on hours and location. The tutoring lab, reading/writing lab, and math lab can be found within the Learning Center in building 12, 8th floor.

Counseling Services: Counseling services are available to students who are experiencing difficulty with academic issues, selection of college major, career planning, disability accommodations, or personal issues. Students may contact Counseling, Career, and Disability Services at 281.401.5311.

The Assistive Technology Lab: The Assistive Technology Lab is available for students who benefit from its various technologies to convert text to speech, magnify items, convert text to Braille, etc. For further information, please contact the Learning Center
in building 12, 8th floor.

Writing Lab: Having strong writing skills helps students become successful not only in their academic lives, but also in their professional and personal lives. With this goal in mind, the University Park Writing Center, located in the Student Learning Center, provides tutoring and additional services to help students strengthen their writing skills. Students enrolled in any course that requires any type of writing can get individualized help at the Writing Center.

Library: The Lone Star College-University Park Library is located in building 12, 8th floor and contains information resources for both college students and community members. Librarians are available to assist with research. To contact a reference librarian, uplibrary-ref@lonestar.edu.
For Library hours and contact information, please visit http://www.lonestar.edu/library .

Lone Star College-University Park Campus and System Policies

Student Behavior Expectations

Students are expected to conduct themselves appropriately while on College property or in an online environment. Students may receive disciplinary action up to and including suspension, if they violate System or College rules, disrupt classes, or interfere with the opportunity of others to obtain an education. Students who pose a threat to the safety of others will be subject to immediate withdrawal from the classroom, campus environment, and/or online environment, as well as face subsequent criminal charges, as appropriate. Please refer to the Student Code of Conduct located online at http://www.lonestar.edu/student-responsibilities.htm for additional information.

Americans with Disabilities Act Statement

Lone Star College-University Park is dedicated to providing the least restrictive environment for all students. We promote equity in academic access through the implementation of reasonable accommodations as required by the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title V, Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) which will enable students with disabilities to participate in and benefit from all post-secondary educational activities.

Disability Services is located on the LSC University Park campus in building 13, Suite 200. You may contact Disability Services at the following number: 281.401.5370. Additional information may be accessed online at the following URL: http://www.lonestar.edu/disability-services.htm

ADA STATEMENT (LSC):
If you require reasonable accommodations because of a physical, mental, or learning disability, it is your responsibility to contact the instructor and present the LSCS Accommodation Form provided by a LSC Disability Services Provider during the first two weeks of class. Check the System Office Catalog for the statement concerning people with disabilities.

Campus Safety and Security

Lone Star College System is committed to maintaining the safety of the students, faculty, staff, and guests while visiting one of our campuses. See http://www.lonestar.edu/safety-nh.htm for details.
Register at http://www.lonestar.edu/12803.htm to receive emergency notifications. In the event of an emergency, contact the police at 5911.

Computer Virus Protection

Computer viruses are, unfortunately, a fact of life. Using flash drives on more than one computer creates the possibility of infecting additional computers and flash drives with computer viruses. This exposes college computers, personal computers, and any other computers to potentially damaging viruses. The college has aggressive anti-virus procedures in place to protect its computers, but cannot guarantee that a virus might not temporarily infect one of its machines. It is your responsibility to protect all computers under your control and use and ensure that each flash drive you use, wherever you use it, has been scanned with anti-virus software.

Equal Opportunity Statement

It is the policy of the Lone Star College System to provide equal employment, admission and educational opportunities without regard to race, color, creed, national origin, gender, age, veteran's status, sexual orientation, or disability.
Lone Star Colleges strive to provide an excellent learning environment free from harassment or intimidation directed at any person's race, color, creed, national origin, gender, age, veteran's status, sexual orientation, or disability. Any form of harassment will not be tolerated.

FERPA

The academic, financial, and non-directory information on your student account is confidential and protected by the Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA). LSCS cannot release certain information to another person without your written authorization. The Authorization to Release Student Information Form can be found at http://www.lonestar.edu/departments/admissions/ARC-011_FERPA_Privacy_Request.pdf.

Internet and E-mail

LSCS provides computing and network resources. You are encouraged to use the computers, software packages, and electronic mail (e-mail) for educational or System-related activities and to facilitate the efficient exchange of useful information. The equipment, software, and network capacities provided through the district computer services are the property of the System. Use of the equipment and networks is to comport with the policies and procedures of the System and access may be denied to any student who fails to comply with the System's policies and procedures regarding its use.
Access to the System's e-mail and similar electronic communications systems are a privilege and certain responsibilities accompany that privilege. All users are expected to demonstrate the same level of ethical and professional manner, as is required in face-to-face or written communications. Threatening, anonymous, or forged messages will be treated as a violation of this policy.

Software Piracy

Law strictly prohibits unauthorized copying of software purchased by Lone Star College-University Park for use in laboratories. Lone Star College-University Park administration will take appropriate disciplinary action against anyone violating copyright laws.

Evaluation of Instruction

Lone Star College-University Park is committed to student success. As part of its' institutional effectiveness efforts, our instructors are assessed in several ways. For the continuous improvement of our instruction, all students are required to provide input for each course they take each semester using the Course Evaluations Questionnaire, which can be accessed online for each course. This occurs approximately half way through your course and your instructor will provide you more information on this process. Once you evaluate your course, print and turn in the receipt of completion to your instructor. The college deans review these evaluations each semester. The deans and/or department chairs may visit each instructor's class at some time during the semester to observe the instructional environment being provided and complete an assessment of the instructor.